

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 164

SO 023 062

AUTHOR Ellington, Lucien
TITLE Japan: Tradition and Change.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-8013-0621-3
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 231p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM Longman Publishing, 95 Church Street, White Plains,
NY 10601-1566 (\$23.95 hardback--ISBN-8013-0621-3; \$18
paperback--ISBN-0-8013-0281-1).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Instructional
Materials (For Learner) (051)
EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Asian Studies; Economics; Elementary Secondary
Education; *Foreign Countries; *Foreign Culture;
Geographic Regions; Nonwestern Civilization; Physical
Geography; Social Studies; World History
IDENTIFIERS *Japan; Japanese Culture; *Japanese People; Japanese
Studies

ABSTRACT

This textbook is designed to increase students' awareness of Japan. The study of Japan is worthwhile because Japan currently is and likely will continue to be one of the world's most important countries. U.S. knowledge of Japan is still quite limited compared to the level of understanding most Japanese exhibit about the United States. It is hoped that knowledge of Japan will leave the student better prepared to face an increasingly interdependent world. This book contains eight chapters: (1) Japan: An Introduction; (2) Geography of Japan; (3) Early History; (4) Modern History; (5) The Japanese Economy; (6) Japanese Institutions; (7) The Japanese People; and (8) Japan and the Future. At the end of each chapter is a list of activities and suggestions for further reading. Numerous black and white photographs appear throughout the book. (DB)

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JAPAN

TRADITION AND CHANGE



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JAPAN

TRADITION AND CHANGE

LUCIEN ELLINGTON

*University of Tennessee
at Chattanooga*



Longman
New York & London

Japan: Tradition and Change

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Longman, 95 Church Street, White Plains, N.Y. 10601

Associated companies:

Longman Group Ltd., London

Longman Cheshire Pty., Melbourne

Longman Paul Pty., Auckland

Copp Clark Pitman, Toronto

Executive editor: Lyn McLean

Production editor: Camilla T. K. Palmer

Cover design: Anne Li

Production supervisor: Priscilla Taguer

ISBN 0-8013-0621-3 (csd)

ISBN 0-8013-0281-1 (pbk)

ABCDEFGHIJ-HA-99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would have never been written without the help of a number of people. Lyn McLean, Longman executive editor, was an enthusiastic supporter from the beginning and offered helpful advice as well. Richard Rice at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and Lynn Parisi at the Social Science Education Consortium in Boulder, Colorado, are two Japan specialists who provided many worthwhile comments, as did Thomas Bibler of the UTC School of Education.

Several people at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga were absolutely invaluable in assisting with such tasks as typing and proofreading the manuscript. The author wishes to sincerely thank Mary Lee Cleveland, Connie Looney, Jane Cashatt, Gayle Barrett, and Patrick Barnes for their help.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to increase your awareness of Japan, which is, and will be for the foreseeable future, one of the world's most important countries. Learning about Japan is more than memorization of facts and figures but must entail some careful thinking on your part about a people who, while similar in many ways to Americans, also think and behave quite differently from us. The time and effort you devote to this task should be worth it because knowledge of Japan will leave you better prepared for an increasingly interdependent world. It is also quite likely you'll acquire a deeper understanding of our own society through using the geography, history, and economy of another country as comparative points of reference.

Throughout our entire history when Americans have studied other nations the emphasis has been on Western Europe, while all of Asia, including Japan, has been ignored. As a result many Americans' knowledge of Japan is quite limited when compared to the level of understanding most Japanese exhibit about the United States. I hope this book will dispel some of that ignorance.

Finally, Japan is such a highly interesting place that there is no excuse for anyone suffering through a dull book on the subject. Therefore, one of my major goals, in addition to assisting you to better understand Japan, was to make this book lively and fun to read. Only you can be the judge of whether I have succeeded.

C H A P T E R



O N E

JAPAN

AN
INTRODUCTION

A WALK THROUGH TOKYO

Two hours ago you landed at Narita, the main airport for Tokyo, Japan's capital. You've just slept through most of the bus ride from the airport to Tokyo Station. From the station, with the assistance of your Berlitz Japanese tourist guide and written English instructions, you manage the 20-minute cab ride to your hotel. You are staying in Akasaka, an area popular with foreigners and one of 23 districts in a city with a larger metropolitan area than New York City. It is four o'clock in the afternoon. Although you're tired from your flight, and Japan is fourteen hours ahead of the U.S. city from which you came, you are also extremely curious to take a firsthand look around. What will a walk down an Akasaka street reveal?

Throngs of people are everywhere. Never, except entering and exiting some sports stadiums back home, have you encountered so many people walking by each other. About a block from your hotel you notice two masses of people descending and ascending stairs that apparently lead to a subway station. Between your side of the street and the other side there are six lanes of two-way traffic and the congestion is unbelievable. You can't tell if the gasoline-like smell is a product of your imagination or the actual fumes from all the cars.

As you walk you notice that almost all the pedestrians have on Western-style dress. Groups of men wear conservative navy blue suits while women on the street wear, for the most part, clothes that you would see in any American city. Occasionally you see an older woman in a kimono, a traditional Japanese dress with a distinctive sash called an *obi*. Some teenage boys are wearing uncomfortable-looking high-collar black uniforms that remind you of movies about American military schools. Girls the same age have on similarly colored black dresses with white blouses. Some young people wear sweat shirts with English words on the front that seem to make little sense. As you walk by a couple of stores, you recognize the unmistakable beat of rock and roll, although you can't understand the words. Passing by an electronics store, you hear an old Beatles song in English.

Signs are mainly in Japanese and are unintelligible to you, but, as you cross major intersections, you notice that printed under the intricate markings are also names which seem to be in English. You sound out the name of the street you are walking down: Aoyama-dori.

You are pleasantly surprised to recognize from color schemes and logos the fast-food restaurants such as Shakey's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and McDonald's that are as American as apple pie. Since the latter is your favorite hamburger haven back in the United States, you cross under the golden arches and enter the store. Immediately you observe that the restaurant is narrow, with stairs leading to a second floor.



Modern Japan: Source: From *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan*, by Mikiso Hane. Copyright © 1982 by Mikiso Hane. Reprinted by permission of Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, Inc.

Almost unbelievably the Big Macs look the same! However, you do notice, from pictures of bananas and kiwi, that they have fruit-flavored milk shakes that you've never seen before.

Also, the teenagers behind the counter, although attired in the same uniforms as back home, seem to be moving at a considerably faster pace than do some of your American friends who work in fast-food places. You feel proud and somewhat comfortable that from listening you quickly learn the Japanese word for Big Mac (Biggu Maku), order one, and upon eating it taste no difference between your first food in Japan and the thousand other fast-food burgers you've consumed.

As you leave McDonald's and walk on, you notice that if there were no Japanese signs on the office buildings and shops, it would be difficult to distinguish the architectural styles of most from those in a typical American city. However, there appears to be somewhere between one-third and one-half more buildings per city block than in the United States. Also, like McDonald's, quite a number of shops are narrower than American stores and have a second floor. Most buildings are much newer than many structures in a typical American street scene.

As you walk between two skyscrapers, though, you pass a small wooded area with two large vertical wooden poles, topped by a horizontal wooden pole, which look like gates and are unlike anything in your home town. Your English language tourist map indicates that the place is a Shinto religious shrine. After walking about 30 minutes, you cross at a traffic light to walk down the opposite side of the boulevard back to the hotel and you suddenly see a large palace and grounds covering several city blocks. There is absolutely nothing Oriental or Japanese about the architectural style of the palace, and upon close observation it reminds you of the famous French palace Versailles that you learned about in school. From one of the numerous Westerners walking along the street you learn that the palace is the residence of the crown prince of Japan, who is heir to the imperial throne.

This brief but intense introduction to Japan leaves you with a definite first impression. Except for the language difference, the Shinto shrine, and the extremely crowded street, you wonder if the Japanese really are that different from Americans after all.

JAPAN: A UNIQUE CULTURE

If, in fact, you were the visitor in the above street scene you would likely have the same first impression. Upon learning that Japanese play baseball, celebrate Christmas (though most Japanese are not Christian), and engage in many Western practices, many people also feel that perhaps Japanese



McDonald's restaurants such as the one in this picture and other American fast-food chains are enormous successes in Japan. Japanese teenagers often "hang out" inside the local McDonald's. Photo courtesy of Joyce Tatum.

are not a very distinctive people. Like many first impressions, this one is erroneous. Japanese are not only different in important ways from both Westerners and other Asians, but a case can be made that Japan is one of the world's more unique cultures. A major purpose of this book is to help you understand how Japan is unique compared with other Asian or with Western countries.

Through your vicarious walk down a Tokyo street you already have an idea of an aspect of human geography—living space—that makes much of the Japanese lifestyle unlike that of other nations. The four major islands in the Japanese archipelago¹ constitute a land area about the size of Montana. However, since nearly three-quarters of Japan is mountainous, the approximately 122 million people who live in Japan occupy a space significantly smaller than the rather small American state of Connecticut. Japan is the most densely populated major nation per habitable land area on earth.² Japanese, individually and collectively throughout life, must take this space problem into account. You'll learn more about Japan's living space dilemma throughout the book and especially in the chapter on geography.

Faced with life in a crowded and unpredictable environment, the Japanese have developed characteristics that have helped them not only to persevere, but to prosper, in comparison with most nations. Beginning in the second half of the sixth century when the collection of tribes on the islands experienced a massive infusion of knowledge from China, the Japanese have continually exhibited a talent for selectively, yet successfully, borrowing from other countries. After over 200 years of adopting Chinese religious practices, writing, and architecture, a period followed when the Japanese, in virtual isolation, shaped what was borrowed from China to fit their own needs.

The same pattern of intense borrowing and adaptation followed by cultural isolation occurred again in the 1500s, when the Japanese encountered, learned from, and then largely turned their backs on Europe. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Japan continued to borrow selectively from other cultures while strongly rejecting what was viewed as unbecoming of Japanese. This ability to pick and choose from other cultures and to adapt what is selected to their own needs makes the Japanese unusual among the world's peoples.

Although some Westerners think of Japan as a nation of copiers, as was the case with our hypothetical visitor's first impressions of Tokyo, the periods of Japanese history when there was almost no contact with foreigners resulted in the development of many original and extremely dis-

¹Archipelago: a group of islands.

²Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), p. 119.

tinictive cultural practices. Take, for example, the typical Japanese attitude toward the daily bath. Bathing is considered such an important and stress-relieving daily ritual in Japan that almost no private homes are constructed where a commode and bathtub are in the same room. Other examples of truly unique cultural elements are the sliding paper panels still to be found in many Japanese houses, and a language that has no close relatives in the world.

Japan also stands alone in that in a historically short period, beginning in 1853 when Commodore Matthew Perry of the U.S. Navy sailed into Tokyo bay and ending in 1918, the country changed from a semi-feudal and relatively backward (by Western standards) country to a leading world power. Not only was this transformation achieved in an unprecedented period of time, but Japan was the first non-Western country to adopt modern technology while remaining strong enough to resist colonization by the European powers or the United States. Our examination of early and modern Japanese history should provide you with some understanding of the context of modern Japanese culture and of Japan's rapid change from feudal to modern nation.

It is quite likely that some time during this very day you have used a Japanese product. In the mid-1950s, Japanese economic output was less than that of Italy, one of the poorer of the Western European countries. Today, with three-tenths of one percent of world land area and about 3 percent of world population, the Japanese rank second in size only to the United States among market economies around the world.³ Japanese business practices are now studied extensively in the United States and elsewhere. Japan's current unemployment rate is on average less than half that of other modern industrialized countries. The Japanese post-World War II economic miracle and the reasons behind it constitute one of the most interesting aspects of Japanese culture about which you'll learn.

Although Japan's dynamic economy has long attracted world attention, people in other countries are now also beginning to study Japanese social institutions.⁴ Japan's schools, political system, and religious institutions, although not without serious problems, have been quite successful by world standards. They also are among some of the most unusual social institutions to be found anywhere on the planet.

Japanese elementary and secondary schools are possibly the world's best, while Japan's colleges and universities are in general considered in great need of reform. Well over one-third of all Japanese have no problems

³James C. Abegglen and George Stalk, Jr., *Kaisha: The Japanese Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), p. 18.

⁴Social institution: A group of individuals organized together for the purpose of perpetuating social norms.

with claiming affiliation with two separate religions. It is also not unheard of for many Japanese on occasion to participate in practices of three different religions.⁵ Japan is a democracy, yet one political party has governed since the early 1950s. In the chapter on social institutions, explanations for these seeming contradictions will be suggested.

If our visitor to Tokyo went out for a second walk on his or her first night in the city and looked carefully, the visitor would see, beside the numerous small restaurants and bars that dot the urban landscape, unattended stacked crates of food, beer, and soft drinks. Imagine the odds against encountering such a phenomenon in the United States or, for that matter, most other countries! Recent statistics indicate that while there are 205 robberies per 100,000 people in the United States, less than 2 per 100,000 occur in Japan.⁶

There are several reasons why Japan enjoys low crime and divorce rates, the world's highest literacy rate, and a reputation for superb products, but one major factor is the enormous positive influence of the group upon individual Japanese behavior. Group pressure on the individual also contributes to the quite common practice of arranged marriages, the general Japanese aversion to nonconformity, and the often ambiguous nature of spoken Japanese. Later we will examine in detail positive and negative aspects of the extremely strong influence of the group in Japan.

For all of Japan's success, the country is also somewhat unique in that since at least the 1600s the Japanese have never had a particularly easy time with other nations. Although since the end of World War II Japan and the United States have been staunch allies, a recent survey of Americans found that when Great Britain and Japan are compared, even though large numbers of us think the Japanese are better businessmen, make the best products, and treat employees best, we would still prefer British investment in this country to Japanese industry.⁷ Is this feeling on the part of Americans based on our misperceptions? Are the Japanese to blame? Or are we both at fault? One of several questions we'll explore when we consider Japan's future is her image problem with much of the rest of the world.

JAPAN: AN INFLUENTIAL NATION

If you are beginning to believe, as we obviously do, that Japan is a unique and highly interesting place, you still might have problems about spending your valuable time learning about one country. Japan is, of course, only

⁵Yoichi Anzai, ed., *Japan 1989: An International Comparison* (Tokyo: Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs, 1988), p. 92.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷Charles P. Freund, "The Zeitgeist Checklist," *The New Republic*, April 11, 1988, p. 8.



Japan has one of the lowest crime rates of any nation in the world. The bicycles on this street are not chained and locked as would be the case in the United States. Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Beattie.

one nation among many that could be worthy of your attention. While Americans should become less ignorant of foreign cultures in general, it is particularly important that we become knowledgeable about nations that most affect us. Japan's profound influence upon the lives of Americans is matched by very few other countries.

All Americans know of the pervasiveness of Sonys, Toyotas, Nissans, Hondas, and other Japanese products in our culture. What many of us don't know, or are just beginning to learn, is the widespread mutual integration of our two nations' economies, the important role Japan plays in American world geopolitical strategy, and the increasing influence the Japanese are exerting on our culture.

The Japanese, with the second largest market economy in the world, are involved in important reciprocal relations with many nations, but nowhere is this more true than in the case of the United States. In a recent year two-way trade between Japan and the United States was \$112 billion dollars, an amount larger than the total worth of most nations' economies. Although we sell the Japanese fewer goods than we buy, Japan is second only to Canada as a market for American products. Japan annually buys more from us than we sell to West Germany, Italy, and France combined.⁸

Also, Japan, and to a lesser extent the United States, are building manufacturing plants and opening businesses in each other's country, thereby creating jobs and wealth. Currently the Japanese are second among foreign nations in U.S. investment, and Japanese investment is growing at a faster rate annually than that of present leader Great Britain. By the late 1980s the Japanese had over 15,000 businesses and manufacturing plants in the United States, worth well in excess of \$50 billion dollars.⁹ At the same time, the United States was the number one foreign investor in Japan, with over 6,000 American manufacturing firms and businesses and a \$4 billion total investment.¹⁰ American companies such as Xerox, Nabisco, and particularly Coca-Cola have extensive and profitable Japanese operations.

In the United States Japanese investment means jobs for Americans in over 40 states. As of 1987, Japanese business employed 250,000 Americans in the United States. Although Japanese businesses often locate in states with large populations, such as California and New York, the economies of Tennessee, Georgia, and Kentucky have been helped recently by Japanese business investment.¹¹

⁸U.S.-Japan Economic Ties: Current Policy Paper #942 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1987).

⁹Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 56.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹¹"Special Report: The Pacific Century," *Newsweek*, February 22, 1988, pp. 56-57.



If present economic trends continue, scenes such as these opening ceremonies for a new Japanese factory in Tennessee will become increasingly common in the United States. Courtesy of the Komatsu Corporation.

Also, there are hundreds of American companies who must hire workers to make products to supply Japanese businesses here, therefore creating even more employment. For example, Nissan Auto Company in Tennessee in a recent year spent \$200 million in the United States on component parts, creating numerous jobs in Tennessee and American companies.¹²

Japan, however, is important to Americans for more than economic reasons. As long as the United States is in an adversarial relationship with the Soviet Union, Japan, whose northern islands are extremely near the Soviet mainland, is highly valued by the U.S. government as a prize location for military and intelligence bases. Even though many American policymakers believe Japan could spend more on its own defense, Japan has the eighth largest military force in the world and is a major ally of the United States.¹³

For most of our history, except when Japan was an enemy in World War II, if Americans thought of the country at all, visions of Japanese gardens or kimonos came to mind. The typical American was, quite frankly, extremely ignorant of Japanese culture. Times are changing! As Japan has achieved world economic prominence, more and more Americans are making an effort to learn more about this important culture.

Interest in Japanese culture is manifesting itself in very unusual ways throughout our nation. There are now 300 Japanese restaurants in New York City alone that specialize in the Japanese delicacy sashimi, or raw fish. Cable News Network, the Atlanta-based national television news station, now broadcasts a weekly television program about Japan. The number of Americans who visit Japan annually, while quite small compared with the number of Japanese who visit this country, has been increasing steadily and in a recent year was over 480,000.¹⁴ Japan is now a high-profile country in the minds of many Americans.

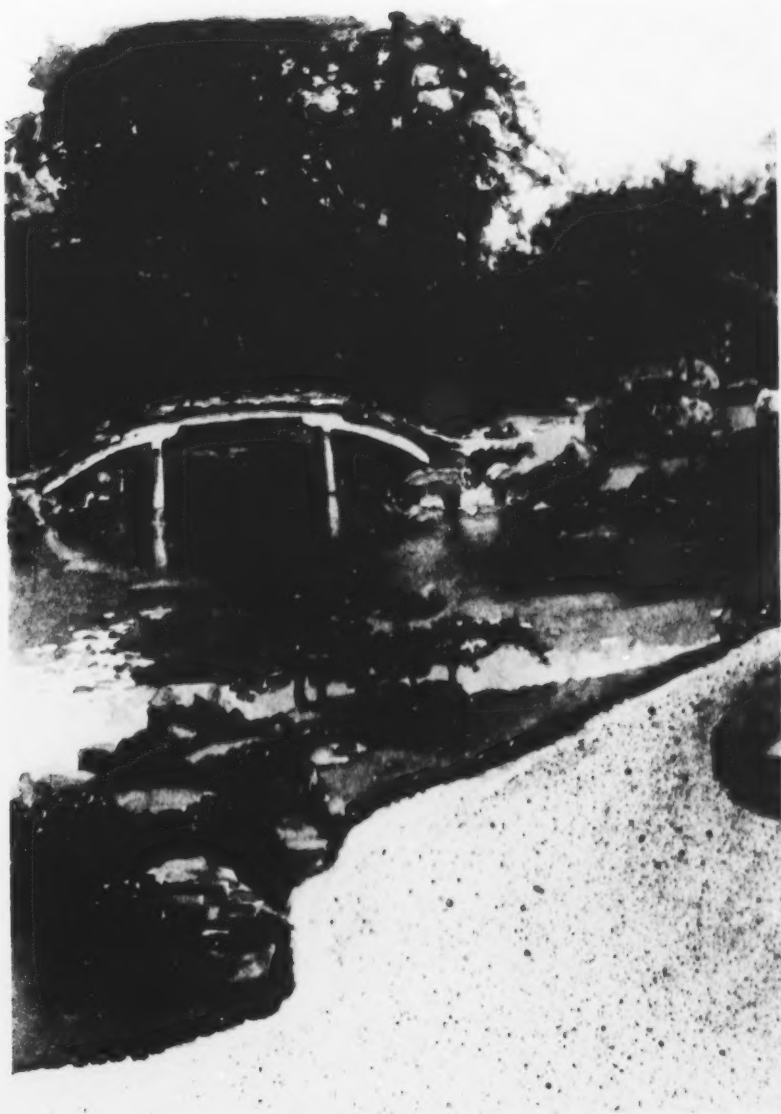
JAPAN AND YOU

By now you might be beginning to agree that Japan is both a highly interesting country to study and too important to Americans to be given short shrift. However, might you benefit personally from knowing more about Japan? Consider the real-life case of an American citizen, Alice Young.

¹²Interview with Louis Lockhardt, Director of International Marketing Division, Tennessee Department of Economic Development, Nashville, November 1986.

¹³Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 85.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 91.



Although Japan ranks among world leaders in science and technology, until recently most Americans' images of Japan focused upon traditional aspects of Japanese culture such as kimonos, temples and shrines, and beautiful gardens such as Sambo-In in Kyoto. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

When Alice Young studied Japanese as a college student a few years ago, people thought she was eccentric. To use her words, it was as if "one was studying Mahayana Buddhism from the sixth and seventh centuries—interesting, but quite useless."¹⁵ Now Ms. Young, who is still under 40, is a full partner in the very prestigious New York City law firm of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley, & McCloy. As head of her firm's Japan Corporate Group, Ms. Young has an office with a commanding view of the Statue of Liberty and New York Harbor and a commanding salary to match.

Now, and almost certainly into the distant future, stories such as Ms. Young's will be increasingly common. Today more and more young Americans are studying Japanese business, language, history, and culture as they realize that, given our internationalized economy, in-depth understanding of Japan will be a valuable twenty-first century asset.

Today Ms. Young is far from alone in language study. By the late 1980s the study of the Japanese language in American universities and colleges had increased by 45 percent compared with the beginning of the decade. Still, the approximately 23,000 American students who study Japanese nationwide can use some company when you consider that over ten times more college students take French than Japanese.¹⁶

Many Americans with Japan-related expertise will, like Ms. Young, work for American companies conducting business in Japan. Other knowledgeable Americans will work for Japanese companies either here or across the Pacific.

People with knowledge of Japan have always been utilized by the federal government, but now, as American states compete to attract Japanese business, investment or assist their residents in selling products in Japan, there are also opportunities in state government. As of the late 1980s 35 American states had established offices in Tokyo for business purposes.¹⁷ Although Japan is a political ally of the United States, Japanese and American companies compete for sales throughout the world. Most American companies now engaged in such competition spend time and money to ensure that they retain employees who are knowledgeable about Japanese business.

Ultimately, Japan, in addition to being a part of the present and future of many of us, is most worth knowing about because it is an extremely interesting and exciting place. It is hoped that some of that excitement will be conveyed to you in this book.

¹⁵*Newsweek*, February 22, 1988, pp. 56–57.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Archipelago
- Social institution

Review Questions

1. List at least three examples from Japanese history or culture that are illustrative of differences between Japan and the United States.
2. In your own words explain in two or three sentences why Japan is, from an economic perspective, very important to the United States.
3. Based on what you've just read, predict in two or three sentences whether most Americans 20 years from now are likely to know more or less about Japan. Cite supporting evidence.

Essay Question

1. In a two- to three-paragraph essay discuss possible reasons for the Americans' answers to the public opinion survey questions about Great Britain and Japan found on page 8.

In-Depth Learning

1. One way to understand firsthand how important Japan already is in the lives of you and your family is to survey your home and make a list of any products you determine are Japanese. The following is a partial list of Japanese brand names found in many American homes: Bridgestone, Brother, Casio, Hitachi, Isuzu, JVC, Mazda, Nissan, Sharp, Sony, TDK, Toyota, Yamaha.
2. Americans and Japanese who have various experiences with each other could be living near you. Locate, if possible, one of the people below and interview him or her about similarities and differences between Japan and the United States.
 - A Japanese exchange student who is visiting the United States.
 - An American who has been to Japan.
 - An American or Japanese who works or has worked for a U.S. company that does business in Japan, or for a Japanese company that conducts business in the United States.
 - Identify, if possible, someone in your community who speaks Japanese and invite him or her to class to discuss various aspects of learning the Japanese language and existing local opportunities to study Japanese.

FURTHER READING

Although specific materials on Japan will be suggested in each chapter, two works you might like to read if you are especially eager to engage in in-depth study are Edwin Reischauer's *Japan: The Story of a Nation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1981), and Robert Christopher's *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983). Both of these books are available in paperback. Reischauer's book is a superb historical overview of Japan, while Christopher's work is a highly readable, yet accurate, depiction of contemporary Japanese society.

C H A P T E R



T W O

GEOGRAPHY
OF
JAPAN

GEOGRAPHY: A SPORTING INTRODUCTION

Do you or friends or relatives play golf? Many Americans find golf, with its demand for great skill and its beautiful, often uncrowded courses, both challenging and relaxing. Golf is also the great love of many Japanese, particularly business executives and managers. The circumstances under which the game is played in Japan, however, serve to introduce some unique geographical problems faced by the people of the Japanese archipelago, problems that are largely absent from the United States and most other nations.

When golf really boomed in Japan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the building of golf courses in a country already starved for living space became a serious political issue in many communities. In some cases local governments now prohibit the construction of any new courses. The result is that in Japan the building of a new golf course, about which most Americans would not think twice, is a newsworthy event.

Japanese golf lovers must also face the economic consequences of high demand for scarce land resources, as illustrated by the following story. A Japanese friend who is a rising young corporate manager reported recently that three years ago he paid the equivalent of \$15,000 in U.S. currency just to join an Osaka-area golf club. This membership fee was actually cheap by Japanese standards, because the club in question is considered in Japanese golf circles to be in the bottom 10 percent of all clubs nationally. Even so, three years later, when the friend was transferred to the United States branch of his company, the value of the membership had increased so much it was sold for the Japanese equivalent of \$25,000.

If you think that you might save money by not joining a club in Japan and only paying greens fees, forget it. The average greens fee for one 18-hole round of golf in Japan will cost you approximately the equivalent of \$140; typical American greens fees, or one-time costs, for 18 holes of golf average \$20. Also in the United States membership fees for a golf club similar to the Japanese club described would cost \$2,000 to \$2,500 and would most certainly not change so dramatically in three short years.¹

Golf is only one of thousands of examples of how daily life in Japan is affected by the geographical problem of land space. Later in this chapter you'll examine the living-space problem in great depth, but other aspects of Japan's geography are also important to understand. Unfortunately, in most ways the geography of Japan has been an obstacle rather than an

¹ Interview with Maeda Shinichi, employee of Komatsu Corporation, Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 20, 1988.

asset in the Japanese people's quest for economic development, safety, and security.

THE PHYSICAL AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF JAPAN

Japan, with four major islands, called Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku, plus thousands of smaller ones, has a total land area of approximately 142,700 square miles. The distance from the northernmost tip of Hokkaido to extreme southern Kyushu is approximately the same as from Bangor, Maine, to Mobile, Alabama, in the United States. Japan is bigger in land area than many countries that you might have imagined to be larger, such as Italy, West Germany, and Great Britain.

Japan's population of over 122 million makes the country the seventh largest nation in the world.² Japan has roughly twice the population of each of four major Western European countries: West Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and France.

Still, when the amount of usable land in Japan is compared with that of other nations, Japan is, in practical terms, much smaller than it looks on a map. Because the islands are extremely mountainous and contain few plains, almost the entire population lives on only about one-sixth of the total land area. Even though Belgium and the Netherlands have higher ratios of people to total land area than Japan, in terms of habitable land, Japan is much more crowded than either country.

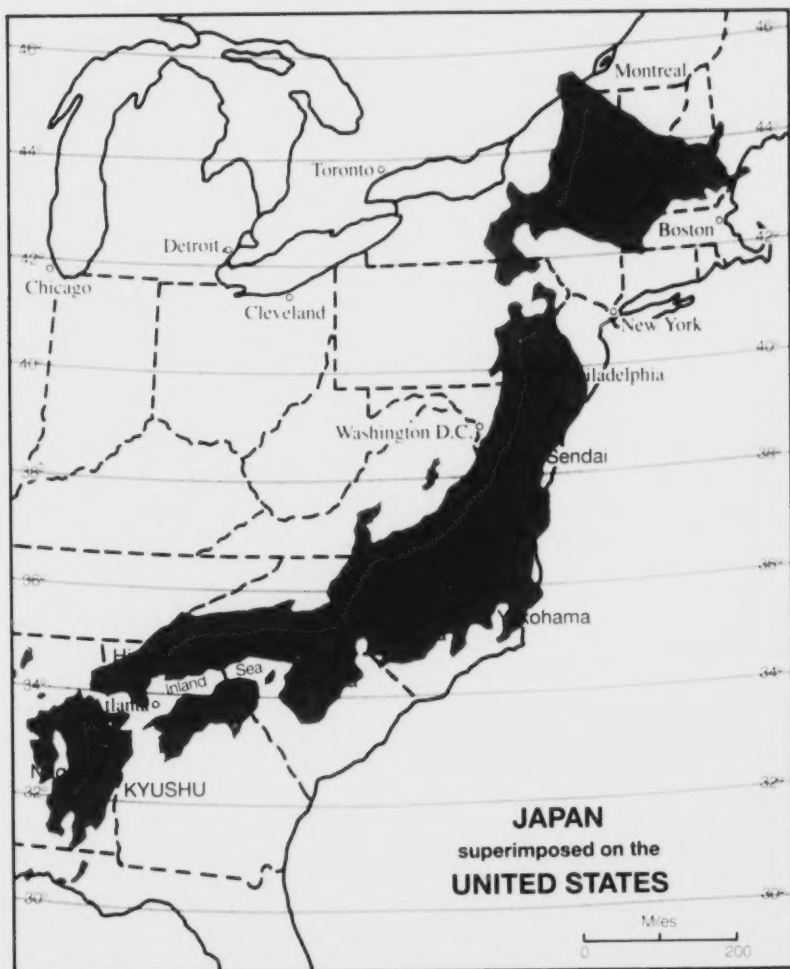
The Japanese thus have the dubious distinction of having the highest density of population and economic production per square mile of habitable land of any major nation in the world.³

Japan's location relative to other nations has been highly significant in shaping Japanese culture and attitudes. The Japanese islands are located in East Asia and are separated by water from other countries. To Japan's north the nearest foreign soil is the Soviet-controlled island of Sakhalin. Although China and Korea have always been important neighbors to Japan, the distances between Japan and these countries are relatively great. One must travel 500 miles across the East China Sea to reach China or travel 120 miles through the Korea Strait to land on Korean soil.

If you've studied Great Britain, you probably know that many writers

² L. Armorel Bester, ed., *Understanding Japan 49: A Teachers' and Textbook Writers' Handbook on Japan* (Tokyo: Shobi Printing Inc., 1985), pp. 15, 63.

³ Hong Kong and Singapore have higher ratios of population per habitable square mile of land than Japan, but each is a city-state, as opposed to a nation-state.



This map of Japan superimposed upon the U.S. East Coast should give you a clearer idea of the size of the archipelago. Source: From Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today*, page 11. Copyright © 1977, 1988 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Adapted by permission of Harvard University Press.

emphasize how important the geographic isolation of the British from the rest of Western Europe was in shaping many of the distinctive features of English life. Yet Japan is five times further away from Korea and 20 times further away from China than the 20-mile distance from the white cliffs of Dover to France!⁴

Today with superspeed air travel and sophisticated electronic communications, the physical distance between Japan and other countries seems slight. Still the habits and attitudes of the people of any nation are strongly influenced by the past, and until just a few decades ago Japan was perhaps the most isolated of all the world's major countries.

Because Japan was difficult to reach, the Japanese avoided being invaded from ancient times until the American occupation in 1945. As was discussed in Chapter 1, historically the Japanese very carefully controlled inflow of foreign influences and for long periods of time chose to have almost no contact with foreign countries. Modern Japanese culture contains foods, words, tools, and practices from other countries that were allowed into Japan in earlier times and also many uniquely Japanese objects and ways of doing things that developed during periods when Japan was extremely isolated.

Japan's early geographic and later self-imposed isolation also influenced the historic and contemporary racial characteristics of the Japanese people. The Japanese are, like their nearest neighbors on the Asian continent, a Mongoloid people. Archeology and history tell us that until about 700 A.D. large groups of people came to the Japanese islands from north-eastern Asia through the Korean Peninsula. The Ainu, a people who shared some characteristics of Caucasians, also settled in early times on the present-day island of Hokkaido and on part of what is now Honshu. However, once humans moved to Japan, geographical isolation and a temperate climate caused few people to leave. Also, from the eighth century through the present, there has been no major infusion of immigrants into the Japanese islands.

The end product of this historical absence of immigration or migration, along with no successful foreign invasion, is a very high level of racial homogeneity in modern Japan.⁵ In fact, the Japanese are one of the most culturally and ethnically homogeneous peoples in the world. Ethnic minorities now living in Japan constitute less than one percent of the population.

The Japanese have long been keenly aware of how racially alike they are compared with most peoples in other nations. This racial commonality

⁴ Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1981), p. 7.

⁵ Homogeneity: indicating that a group is of the same or a similar nature, as opposed to the term *heterogeneity*, which indicates that a group is of a different nature.

within Japan has in part spawned a deep-seated notion among many Japanese that they are so unique that foreigners cannot ever really understand their language or culture. This sentiment, which one Japan specialist called an "island mentality," in turn contributes to outstanding Japanese talent for teamwork and to the difficult time many Japanese have in closely relating to anyone who is a foreigner.⁶

Although Japan's longtime geographic isolation from other nations is an important influence, the climate and physical features of the islands also have played a part in molding Japanese culture.

Mountains are the most common topographical feature of Japan, with over 67 percent of the land area classified as mountainous. Japanese mountains tend to be extremely wooded and quite beautiful. If your definition of mountains includes only elevations of over 10,000 feet then perhaps it would be best to think of Japan as a nation of forested hills. Most Japanese mountains are only a few thousand feet high, although in central Honshu in the Japanese Alps there are ranges that soar as high as 10,000 feet. Mount Fuji can be found in the same general part of Honshu as the Japanese Alps. This perfectly shaped extinct volcanic cone attains a height of 12,389 feet and is probably Japan's most famous geographic symbol.

Although beautiful, Japan's mountains have been more of a hindrance than an asset to people: because of the high percentage of mountainous terrain in Japan, there are few level areas. The 120-square mile Kanto Plain on Honshu, which includes Tokyo, is the most extensive plain in Japan. Japan is so mountainous that less than 20 percent of the land area is level enough for agricultural cultivation. Historically, the mountains were barriers to communication, trade, and political unification within Japan. Today they still constitute largely wasted space, from an economic utilization perspective. Most Japanese are reluctant to live in the mountains for fear of volcanic activity and landslides, expense, and inconvenience. Also, few industries locate in the mountains. The result is that throughout Japan one observes homes, factories, businesses, and farms jammed next to each other on the scarce level land.

Japan is fortunate to have, by and large, a quite temperate climate. Although there are substantial climatic variations within Japan, particularly in sparsely populated and rather cold Hokkaido and in warm southern Kyushu, in general, Japanese weather is similar to that of the U.S. East Coast. However, Japan experiences more annual rainfall and most of Japan is warmer, both in the winter and in the summer, than the northeastern section of the American East Coast.

⁶ Jackson Bailey, "Japan on the World Scene: Reflections on Uniqueness and Commonality," in John J. Cogan and Donald O. Schneider, eds., *Perspectives on Japan: A Guide for Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983), p. 85.



This natural scene with wooded mountains and the coast is illustrative of three common but beautiful aspects of Japan's physical geography: mountains, forest, and ocean. Photograph taken by author.

Most of Japan's great cities on the main island of Honshu enjoy weather remarkably similar to that of the American states of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. For example, the average January and August Tokyo temperatures of 38.6°F and 79.7°F and the humidity levels are very similar to what might be found in Nashville, Tennessee, or Norfolk, Virginia.⁷

Because of the temperate climate, there are long growing seasons in Japan. Historically, the scarce agricultural land could be utilized very productively to support large numbers of people. Rice, despite recent production declines, is still Japan's major crop, and rice farming constitutes over one-third of all agricultural production. Most rice is grown in fields that lend themselves to irrigation, while nonirrigated fields are devoted to fruits and vegetables. Since Japanese farms are quite small, only 2.5 percent of total cultivable land can be utilized as pasture land for beef or other animals. This type of animal husbandry is found chiefly in Hokkaido.

Even though Japanese farmers are some of the most productive in the world, Japan's large population and the small space available for farming have meant that since the beginning of this century Japan has been forced to depend upon foreign countries for a portion of its food. Currently, approximately 30 to 35 percent of Japan's total food supply must be imported in order to feed the nation's population. Beans, meat, milk, and fruit are some of the foods that the Japanese must purchase from abroad. Despite Japan's tremendous recent economic successes, few Japanese ever forget that they inhabit a country that is incapable of feeding itself.⁸

During the twentieth century Japanese agriculture has experienced massive change. In the early 1900s farmers made up 60 percent of the Japanese population. By the 1980s the percentage of Japanese employed as farmers had declined to well under 10 percent of the total workforce.⁹ Although Japanese agricultural production has increased throughout the last few decades, farm mechanization and the enormous expansion of industry have transformed Japan into one of the world's most urban countries. This transformation has meant the end of traditional rural living patterns for most Japanese.

Cities have been part of Japan's geography since 710 A.D., when an early emperor established the city of Nara. By 1700 Tokyo, or Edo, as it was then called, had an estimated population of over 1 million people, making it possibly the largest city in the world. Still, until well into the

⁷ George H. Kakiuchi, Pamphlet on the Geography of Japan (Tokyo: Japan Air Lines, 1965).

⁸ Agricultural statistics compiled from Yoichi Anzai, ed., *Japan 1989: An International Comparison* (Tokyo: Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs, 1988), p. 17.

⁹ Bester, *Understanding Japan* 49, pp. 22-23.

twentieth century most Japanese have lived in rural areas. Today 75 percent of Japanese live in cities while 90 percent of the population work in urban environments.¹⁰

The largest concentration of people is in the Kanto Plain, which includes Tokyo, in Central Honshu. One estimate is that 30 million people, or one in four Japanese, live within a 31-mile radius of the Emperor's palace, located in central Tokyo. Tokyo, with over 8 million people, is only one of eleven Japanese cities whose populations exceed a million. The 300-mile distance along the eastern Honshu coast from Tokyo south to Osaka, the second largest Japanese city, is almost completely urbanized, and it contains one-third of the entire Japanese population. Although massive urbanization has been in many ways beneficial to Japan's economy, it has complicated Japan's fundamental problem of living space and caused major air and water pollution.¹¹

Urban nations in particular, since they rely on business and industry for economic growth, must have access to both a great variety and amount of natural resources. The Japanese are not self-sufficient in vitally important commodities such as iron ore, petroleum, lead, zinc, copper, and timber. The energy situation is particularly critical. Japan must import over 99 percent of its oil and is dependent upon foreign countries for over 80 percent of its total energy requirements. In contrast, the United States is dependent upon foreign imports for only about 14 percent of its total energy needs. In the event of a crisis or war involving the oil-producing countries of the world, the Japanese would have every reason to fear for their economy and, indeed, the very fabric of their society.¹²

The resource picture is not completely dark for the Japanese, however, since there are two great resources with which Japan has been blessed. One is the sea. No part of Japan is over 70 miles from the sea and Japan has a total of 16,800 miles of coastline as well as a large inland sea.

In Japanese history the ocean was a great boon for transportation, and the sea has always been a wonderful source of food. Herring, cod, halibut, salmon, crab, sardines, tuna, skipjack, sea breams, mackerel, yellowtail, octopus, eel, seaweed, and squid are just a few of the sea life that ends up on Japanese tables. In traditional Japanese cuisine it is most unusual to eat a meal that does not include some kind of food from the sea. Although consumption of fish has been declining in recent years, fishing is still a

¹⁰ Yasuo Masai, "A Geographic Perspective on Japan," in Cogan and Schneider, eds., *Perspective on Japan*, p. 23.

¹¹ Geographic statistics compiled from Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 98, and "Tokyo in Torment: The Disoriented City," *The Economist*, 307, no. 7545 (April 19, 1988), 21-24.

¹² Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 59.



This worker at approximately 5:00 A.M. at the Tsukiji Central Fish Market in Tokyo is inspecting part of the daily tuna catch. The enormous Tsukiji market handles all fish consumed in the Tokyo area. Photo courtesy of Richard Rice.

major industry as Japan is number one in the world in both the quantity of fish procured and the annual commercial value of the catch.¹³

Second the Japanese people themselves are without a doubt Japan's greatest resource. Throughout history few people have proven to be more hard working, intelligent, accepting, and resourceful than the Japanese. The above traits are especially important in a small, overcrowded country. In the next section you will see how the incredibly difficult geographic problem of acute scarcity of living space constantly calls upon the Japanese people to stretch both their wits and their efforts.

THE LIVING SPACE PROBLEM

Imagine if the American government considered replacing Washington, D.C., with a new capital city within the next twenty years. Think of the logistical problems, the enormous expenditures, and the general confusion that would likely result from the implementation of such a policy. Currently, although the proposal is very controversial, this is exactly what is being considered by the Japanese government.

The Liberal Democrats, Japan's leading political party, are seriously studying and debating a proposal to move all government facilities to a location between 94 and 156 miles from the present capital of Tokyo. The proposal, which, if adopted, would result in a new capital city, would take an estimated twenty years and cost the equivalent of \$154 billion. The major reason for the possible move is the incredible congestion in Tokyo due to limited space. In a related development the government has already approved a list of 31 agencies to be moved to other parts of Japan in order partially to relieve Tokyo's congestion problems.¹⁴

Tokyo has the worst congestion, but since much of Japan's land does not lend itself to development, lack of living space is a permanent problem that affects almost every aspect of a Japanese person's life.

Lack of space is particularly severe in cities. The daily task of going from one place to another is much more problematic for the average Japanese than for the average American or European. Even though Japan has only a little over half the number of cars as in the United States, many Japanese city streets average as many as ten times as many cars daily as American streets. Based on the size of each nation's population, the Japanese average about one and a half times the number of deaths due to

¹³ Masai in *Perspectives on Japan*, p. 21.

¹⁴ "Japan Considering Moving Capital," News from Japan (Washington, D.C.: Japan-U.S. News and Communications), March 18, 1988.

automobile accidents as does the United States.¹⁵ A major reason that Japanese streets are so crowded and dangerous for vehicles and pedestrians is that there is little room to build adequate expressways in urban areas. This incredible congestion makes it impossible for Japanese to depend upon the car to the extent that it is used in the United States.

Fortunately the Japanese have one of the best train and subway systems in the world, serving well over one-third of the nation's population.¹⁶ Still, particularly in Tokyo, using subways and trains during rush hours can be uncomfortable at best and, because of the enormous numbers of users, dangerous at times.

During rush hour Tokyo subway cars often are jammed to over twice their capacity and passengers are warned not to board subways with their arms in awkward positions because of the possibility of broken bones. In rare cases babies have suffocated on crowded Japanese subways. Windows sometimes shatter because of the crowds, and every day dozens of riders lose shoes. Station attendants on commuting trains and subways often must shove the last few people entering a car on board in order to close the doors. In winter the situation is particularly frenetic as heavy clothing increases the average rider's bulk and forces officials to employ more shovers.

Since most Japanese cannot afford to live near work, subway and train comfort is important, particularly in Tokyo, where commuters often travel two and one-half to three hours each way daily. In every nation housing costs tend to be lower as one travels away from the central part of a city, but in Japan space for housing in cities is at such a premium that there are very few alternatives other than long commutes.¹⁷

In central Tokyo most Japanese can afford only the smallest apartments. By the late 1980s the average cost for a five-room condominium in the Tokyo suburbs was approximately \$416,667 in U.S. dollars. A suburban home one and one-half hours from Tokyo, with less floor space than in an American home, would cost \$1,250,000 in U.S. dollars! Fortunately, although housing is expensive all over Japan, prices for dwellings outside of the Tokyo area are considerably lower than the above amounts.¹⁸

The effect of lack of adequate living space upon the daily quality of life of a typical Japanese person is an even more important factor than simply

¹⁵ Edward J. Lincoln, *Japan: Facing Economic Maturity* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), p. 50.

¹⁶ Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 30.

¹⁷ Commercial urban space is also extremely expensive. As of the late 1980s office rents per square feet were ten times higher than in New York City. As reported in the April 9, 1988, *Economist*.

¹⁸ Richard Kauffman, "Tokyo's Housing Dilemma: Who's Paying the Price," *Japan Journal*, 8, no. 1 (April, 1988), 78-83.



This photo was taken in a Tokyo subway car during the morning rush hour. Millions of Japanese live with this kind of uncomfortable situation on a daily basis. Photo courtesy of Joyce Tatum.

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the high cost of housing. The average Japanese home or apartment is cramped, noisy, and very cluttered, and individual privacy is usually difficult or impossible to obtain.

Estimates vary, but the average floor space of the urban Japanese house is somewhere between one-third to one-half that of an average U.S. urban home. Although Japanese apartments will likely be divided into two small rooms and a tiny kitchen and a bathroom, usually the entire apartment will be no larger than an average-sized room in an American apartment. A third of the housing facilities of Tokyo average only 11 by 11 feet in area, while in the United States the typical suburban bedroom alone will be 12 by 12!¹⁹

Use of the small space available in homes and apartments has also changed with Japan's recent economic affluence. Traditionally, Japanese utilized the limited space available in their homes in very flexible ways. Rooms would contain very little furniture. Instead of a sofa and chairs there would only be a low table in the middle of the room. Family members would sit on the floor on straw tatami mats, and at night the table would be pushed aside and futons, the traditional Japanese sleeping roll, would be taken from the closet and spread out. Therefore, one room could easily be used for eating, recreation, and sleeping. In the past traditional Japanese houses were also pleasing in appearance because of the lack of big heavy furniture.

Japanese homes now are in some ways more difficult places in which to spend large amounts of time than in the past. The rise in living standards and changes in cultural preferences mean that even though average family size is smaller and the available living space is larger than in the past, the interiors of houses now tend to look extremely cluttered. A recent survey of 140 homes and apartments in Japan revealed that in most homes every available inch of wall space is now taken up with wardrobes, bureaus, and big furniture. Piles of boxes used for storage are likely to be visible in several rooms. Rooms are littered with children's toys, and a large variety of decorative objects such as stuffed animals and French dolls are likely to be found on top of television sets and pianos.

Japanese urban dwellers, while usually retaining one or two traditional rooms with tatami mats, now usually own Western-style beds, sofas, and heavy chairs. Because of recent acquisitions of objects ranging from electric rice cookers to refrigerators, the typical Japanese house is now so crowded that in only one of the 140 households surveyed could the sewing machines present in homes be used without prior removal of other objects on top of the machine.²⁰

¹⁹ Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 29.

²⁰ Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), p. 126.

Lack of adequate home space forces Japanese to pursue a number of activities outside the house that Americans would engage in at home. For example, almost no Japanese homes have lawn space or outside play equipment for children. Many Japanese students do their homework in study areas provided by their schools or in public libraries because of the lack of space and high noise level at home. In some cities families even rent study hall space for children. Most Japanese when entertaining friends cannot do so in their own homes so groups are more likely to go out to restaurants or other public places to socialize than is the case in many countries. There are now even buildings in Tokyo where people who can't take the noise and congestion of their home can rent a private reading room!²¹

Lack of enough space in general is so widespread a problem in Japan that at an early age children are taught how best to cope with the problem. For example, if you visited a typical third-grade social studies class in Japan, you would find eight-year-olds poring over town and city maps to learn important avenues, streets, and subway routes. These students would also be assigned problems by their teacher in which they would be called upon to find the best way to get from one section to another section of their town or city. An important reason that young Japanese children learn such detailed map reading is that, because of auto traffic density, even many small children must learn to use mass transit to get to school or other activities.²²

Japanese families who come to the United States to assist in establishing Japanese plants are always quick to report that one of the most enjoyable things about living in this country is the opportunity for children to have space in their own backyards to play. When Japanese children later return to Japan, their teachers report that young people often go through a culture shock that is partially related to the problem of space. It is typical for returning students to have problems dealing with commuting and with Japan's crowded roads, and some returning young people even report temporary feelings of depression because their houses seem so small.²³

Lack of adequate habitable space in Japan affects not only where people live, how they travel, what they must learn, and their recreational activities, but also most economic activity. For example, as you learned earlier, there is a direct relationship between lack of agricultural land and the kinds of crops that can be grown on Japanese farms. So that you might

²¹ Ibid., p. 134.

²² Author's observations of Japanese elementary school classes and interview with faculty, Mitaka, Japan, June 1987.

²³ Interview with Mrs. Janet Snotgrass, English teacher at International Christian University Attached High School, Mitaka, Japan, June 3, 1987.

better understand the ramifications of lack of land space upon the economically vital occupation of agriculture, in the next few pages you'll meet a real Japanese farmer and examine how geography affects his work through comparing it to the experiences of a real-life American farmer.

THE OKAS

Mr. Oka, a slender man in his 40s, and his family of six live in a modest home a quarter of a mile from their farm, which is located near Tsu City in south central Honshu. Although in Japan the Okas are considered rural, because over 324 people live in one square kilometer (slightly over one-half square mile), Mr. Oka's farm is surrounded by houses, businesses, and other structures.

Mr. Oka, his wife, their two adult unmarried sons, and Mr. Oka's parents all assist in farm work. The farm provides 30 percent of the annual family cash income and much food. Mr. Oka and his sons also have full-time manufacturing jobs in Tsu.

Although Mr. Oka's land is valued at 40 million yen, or approximately \$333,000, the entire farm is only two and three-quarter acres. The Okas' farm is smaller than most farms in Japan, but not dramatically so, since the average Japanese farm size is only slightly more than four acres. The Okas grow rice and vegetables, which, given the size of their farm, are the only feasible crops.

The Okas' major crop is rice. The first stage of early spring rice production is the growing of tiny seedlings in trays inside Mr. Oka's barn, which is the size of a typical hobby workshop found in the backyard of many American suburban homes. Later in the spring the rice beds in the fields are prepared and the rice is replanted. At the end of August the rice is harvested, husked and dried in the barn, and then sold. The Okas' farm is highly mechanized, with a tractor, cultivator, combine, husking machine, and rice dryer. However, the equipment, although expensive, is small by American standards. The tractor is the size of an American riding lawnmower and none of the other equipment is as tall as the average adult. Because of the small space of the average Japanese farm, large equipment would be both inefficient to use and difficult to store.

Even though the Okas use a variety of equipment in their farming and also do much hand work with the vegetables they grow, there is one farming technique employed in most parts of the world that the Okas, because of lack of space, cannot utilize. In most agricultural regions land from time to time is allowed to remain fallow or unplanted so that soil nutrients lost from crop growth may be replenished. Since the small size of Japanese farms makes it much more costly for a Japanese farmer not to plant a crop than for farmers in more spacious countries, Mr. Oka must regularly use a large amount of inorganic and organic fertilizer to keep his land productive.

THE STURDIVANTS

Mr. Tommy Sturdivant, a stocky, bearded, friendly American farmer in his 30s, and his family of four live in a house that is about 50 percent larger than the Okas'. Like the Okas, the Sturdivants dwell in a rural area, but the large



In this photo Mr. Oka, the Japanese farmer described in this section, is standing by his barn and truck. The size of the truck is typical of those found on Japanese farms. Photo courtesy of Jane Duffy.



Mr. Sturdivant is standing in front of the farm shop and one of his tractors. Both the building and tractor are many times larger than what would be found on a typical Japanese farm. Photo by author.

amount of habitable land available in the United States relative to Japan causes the concept "rural" to have different meanings in the two countries. The part of Mississippi where the Sturdivants live has less than 20 people per square meter, or approximately 16 times less people for the same amount of space as Japan.

The Sturdivants own a farm of 1,200 acres which is so much larger than the Okas' that some comparisons become difficult. The Sturdivant farm, which is located in the rich soil of the northwest corner of Mississippi called the "Delta," is between two and three times the size of the average U.S. farm of over 400 acres. However, most U.S. farmers who actually earn all their income from agriculture own farms that are at least 800 to 900 acres, so the Sturdivant farm is not substantially larger than many typical American commercial farms. Primarily because of a surplus of agricultural land in the United States, the Sturdivant farm is valued at \$1,800 an acre, which is over 60 times less valuable per acre than the Okas' small plot.

Cotton, which is not grown in Japan because of the lack of space, and soybeans, which the Japanese grow in only small amounts for the same reason, constitute the Sturdivants' two major crops. Both are planted in the spring and harvested in the late fall. Even though the Okas' farm is quite mechanized, the Sturdivant farm is even more so with Mr. Sturdivant owning five tractors, two large trucks, two cotton pickers, three combines, and other assorted farm equipment. If you will recall, all six of Mr. Oka's family worked on the farm at various times. Mr. Sturdivant has six full-time employees who, because of the high mechanization level, are able to work the entire farm.

A major problem for Mr. Sturdivant and Mr. Oka is pest and weed control. However, the great difference in cultivable space makes each farmer approach this challenge in a very different way. While Mr. Sturdivant uses both airplanes and a special piece of farm equipment pulled by a tractor to spread pesticides and herbicides, Mr. Oka must apply by hand all the chemicals he uses to fight pests. Although both the Sturdivants and the Okas use fertilizer regularly to replace nutrients, because of the large amount of land Mr. Sturdivant owns, he can afford to allow a substantial amount of land each year to remain fallow to ensure further the growth of good crops in the future.

The Okas and Sturdivants are alike in some ways regarding their work. Each family works hard during planting and harvesting, must pay for costly equipment, worries about the weather, and watches closely the ever-changing market prices for the crops they grow. However, the massive difference in available space for farming in these two situations causes these two farmers' work lives to be much more different than similar.²⁴

After reading about the extensive economic and social problems associated with the lack of habitable land in Japan, you might find it strange that the Japanese have accrued some benefits from their space dilemma. The

²⁴ Case studies compiled by author after visits to the two farms in October 1984 and March 1985.

Japanese have been psychologically influenced by lack of space to try to perfect their own immediate environment. This attitude in turn has, according to some scholars, contributed both to the successes Japanese artists and writers have enjoyed with detail in art and literature, and to Japanese industries' worldwide reputation for mastering the small but vital details necessary for the construction of superior products.²⁵

The next time you see a bonsai tree in an American store or even the new mini-bonsais that can fit in the palm of the hand, remember that these fascinating dwarf versions of giant trees that the Japanese gave the rest of the world were, in part, the result of the Japanese shaping their environment to fit the small amount of land upon which they must always live.

THE HAZARDS OF LIVING IN JAPAN

Obviously, being human is to a certain extent dangerous, but in few of the world's countries does the geography put people at as much risk as in Japan. You already learned that Japan possesses almost no natural resources. This is not a problem as long as Japan can procure vital minerals and commodities through international trade. However, in the 1970s the threat of the loss of supply of one essential resource graphically reminded the Japanese people of their dangerous dependency upon the outside world.

In the closing months of 1973, as a protest against support of Israel, a group of Arab nations ceased selling oil to a number of nations including the United States and Japan. While Americans reacted to the boycott with rage, since Japan imports almost all its oil the Japanese were truly afraid. Many Japanese began to hoard everything, even toilet paper, until the national government issued public statements promising there would be enough of this vital resource for everyone. Companies decreed emergency measures to conserve energy, and lavatory faucets in business and industry were reduced to producing only cold water. There was a flurry of small business bankruptcies and many people temporarily lost jobs.²⁶

As weeks passed, the panic continued. Despite government reassurances, consumers continued to buy stores out of such basic items as detergents. Caches of as much as 500,000 gallons of oil were found illegally hidden throughout Japan. A golfer chasing an errant golf ball down a ravine

²⁵ Speech by Edwin Reischauer on the 40th anniversary of the Tokyo *Shinbun* (newspaper). Reprinted in Linda S. Wojtan, *Introduction to Japan: A Workbook* (Washington, D.C.: Youth for Understanding, 1986), p. 28.

²⁶ David Halberstam, *The Reckoning* (New York: Avon Books, 1986), pp. 511-12.

near Osaka discovered 625 large drums of oil. Perhaps the best illustration of the volatile atmosphere of that time occurred in Tokyo, where the friend of a woman about to be hired by Toyokawa Credit Bank happened to joke that the bank was about to go bankrupt. Within 13 hours 4,800 depositors had withdrawn the equivalent of \$5 million in yen from the bank and its branches.²⁷ Although the oil crisis passed and Japan's oil consumption was reduced by more than 20 percent, a future cessation of supplies of energy, or even food, could bring the Japanese economy to its knees.

Being Japanese is geographically hazardous in more basic ways than natural resource shortages. Central Japan, including Tokyo, is one of the world's worst earthquake areas. Throughout Japan an average of 7,500 earthquakes are recorded each year and approximately 1,500 can be felt by people. In Tokyo alone 40 to 50 earthquakes detectable to the human body occur in any given year.²⁸ Because of the frequency of earthquakes, tremors strong enough to gently shake a sleeper in bed often receive minor coverage in the Japanese media.

Unfortunately, several earthquakes and resultant fires have done much more than cause slight tremors. In 1657, 1703, and 1923 much of Tokyo was destroyed by earthquake and accompanying fires.

The 1923 quake was by far the worst in modern times. On September 1, on a warm, windy day at one minute and 15 seconds after noon, the earthquake struck. The initial shocks were so violent that the Japanese government's seismograph used to measure tremors went out of commission. Tokyo Imperial University's seismological equipment recorded 1,700 quakes over the next three days. Shortly after the quake began, chemical spills and out-of-control cooking fires started an estimated 130 fires. In one of the poorest parts of Tokyo over 30,000 people who, with all the belongings they could carry, squeezed into a huge vacant lot to escape the flames were incinerated by huge whirlwinds of fire. Residents of Karuizawa, a hundred miles away, reported that at night they could see the sky aglow from the burning Japanese capital.

Although only one of Tokyo's fifteen districts escaped the disaster untouched, the nearby city of Yokohama was even more devastated. Only four to five buildings in Yokohama's central business district were left standing as the earthquake and fires destroyed virtually the entire city.

Government estimates of the dead and wounded in the 1923 earthquake stand at over 156,000 people and the property damage was incalculable. From Tokyo south the earthquake destroyed 60 miles of railroad track. Over a million people left the Tokyo-Yokohama area temporarily

²⁷ "In Tokyo, The Party Is Over," *Time*, 102, no. 27 (December 31, 1973), 36.

²⁸ Bester, *Understanding Japan* 49, p. 27.



The 1923 earthquake did severe damage to Japanese industry. The rubble in this photograph had been a prosperous textile mill until the quake. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

because of the disaster, and for a time there was a labor shortage that impeded reconstruction efforts.²⁹

Examinations of historical and seismological records indicate that the 1923 earthquake was not an isolated event. In 1978 on the relatively underpopulated Izu Peninsula, 75 miles southwest of Tokyo, a severe quake caused 110 landslides, the equivalent of \$25 million in damages, and 25 deaths. In Tokyo huge television towers and skyscrapers swayed. Several Tokyo officials estimated that had the quake been nearer the capital city, Tokyo would have been decimated.³⁰ Since almost half of Tokyo-area houses are still made of wood and the area population has quintupled since 1923, current estimates are that in a worst-case scenario a major Tokyo earthquake would leave a million people dead. The most optimistic projections, despite such precautions as earthquake preparedness education and "earthquake proof" high-rises, assume that in the event of a major quake 50,000 people will be killed. Some seismologists, after examining historical records, predict a major quake in the Tokyo area before the beginning of the twenty-first century.³¹

As if earthquakes were not bad enough, the Japanese must deal annually with an average of six to seven tropical cyclones, which are better known as typhoons. Typhoons, most of which originate in the Philippine Sea in the late summer and early fall, can be devastating to both humans and property. In October 1959 a terrible typhoon crashed through Nagoya, Japan's fourth largest city, killing 5,000 people and leaving 400,000 homeless. Seven days after the storm over 25,000 people were still stranded on their roofs because of the water.³²

Little usable land, almost no natural resources, incredible urban congestion, earthquakes, typhoons—the list of seemingly ill-fated aspects of Japanese life caused by the physical and human geography of the archipelago is long. Still, as of 1987 the average life expectancy of almost 76 years for men and 81 years for women made the Japanese the most long-lived people in the world.³³ This statistic is at least partial evidence that, despite the seemingly cruel hand nature dealt Japan, the Japanese people are amazingly flexible and resilient. Through an exploration of Japanese history we can begin to understand how, despite a difficult natural environment, the Japanese people have not only survived, but prospered in the world arena.

²⁹ Accounts of the 1923 earthquake excerpted from Arthur Morgan Young, *Japan in Recent Times: 1912–1926* (New York: W. Morrow Company, 1929), pp. 295–304.

³⁰ John H. Douglas, "Letter from Tokyo (6): Waiting for the Great Tokai Quake," *Science News*, 113, no. 17 (April 29, 1978), 282–86.

³¹ Fosco Maraini, *Tokyo* (Amsterdam: Time-Life International, 1976), p. 5.

³² "Typhoon!," *Life*, 47 (October 12, 1959), 38–39.

³³ Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 9.

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Homogeneity
- "Island Mentality"
- Kanto Plain
- Honshu
- Typhoon

Review Questions

1. Describe in a short paragraph features of the physical geography of Japan.
2. Why is Japan a "smaller country" than it looks?
3. In a short paragraph cite examples of how lack of space affects the lives of Japanese.
4. In two or three sentences list some "major hazards" of being Japanese.

Essay Question

1. In a one- or two-page essay compare and contrast the geography of Japan and the United States. Address issues relating to physical geography, living space, and natural resource availability

In-Depth Learning

1. Area and population, as numbers, have little meaning, yet they determine the behavior of real people. How big is 145,670 square miles? Japan is a little smaller than California, with a climate like that of the East Coast of the United States and a population of 120 million, approximately one-half that of the entire United States.

Set out three chairs. Each represents approximately 50,000 square miles. Ask two volunteers, each representing 10 million people, to sit on them. Note the empty chair; if the two don't like each other, they can leave empty space between them. This is California. Now, on the same three chairs, representing Japan, invite twelve volunteers to sit. Before the chairs collapse from the weight of the group or the group from laughter, note that because of the mountains, only one-sixth of Japan's area is usable for agriculture and concentrations of population—all twelve should be sitting on *half* a chair! In terms of usable land, Japan is the world's most densely populated country. Note that this exercise can be adapted to any state with which students are familiar (based on activity developed by Elgin Heinz).

2. In the late 1980s one square meter in the Ginza, an expensive section of Tokyo, cost approximately \$215,000 in U.S. currency. Measure your classroom, deter-

mine the total number of square meters, and calculate what your classroom would be worth in U.S. dollars if it was located in the Ginza.

FURTHER READING

The Christopher and Reischauer books described at the end of Chapter 1 have excellent sections on the physical and human geography of Japan. Also, if you are interested in how the problem of space has influenced Japanese culture, an especially interesting book with superb photographs is *The Compact Culture: The Ethos of Japanese Life*, Mitsukuni Yoshida, Ikko Tanaka, and Tsune Sesoko, eds. (Tokyo: Cosmos Public Relations Corporation, 1982). Another recommended book on the same subject is O-Young Lee's *Smaller Is Better: Japan's Mastery of the Miniature* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982). *Cultural Atlas of Japan* by Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen, and Isao Kumakura (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1988), is a wonderful general reference on the human and physical geography of Japan.

C H A P T E R



T H R E E

EARLY HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Now that you've lived in the Akasaka district of Tokyo for a month, you have quite mixed feelings about your knowledge of Japan. Sometimes you think you are beginning to understand the Japanese and at other times you feel quite confused.

Everyday life in your American hometown is, in several respects, less technologically exciting than Tokyo. Here the taxicab doors automatically fly open every time you enter or exit, many buses contain televisions and even speaker systems, and there are bilingual television channels. Almost everywhere you encounter impressive electronic gadgets.

You are not surprised that Japan seems to be so technologically advanced after you learn from a television news broadcast that the Japanese, with half our population, graduate the same number of engineers annually as does the United States. However, you do wonder just what caused Japan to become such a world leader in science and technology. Did the country become so advanced in just a few years or was the groundwork laid long ago?

Even though the Japanese seem quite advanced technologically, you've seen some ways they behave that appear quite inconsistent for an advanced society. For instance, last week you observed a crowd scene in front of a small store. A man in a white robe with a high black conical cap was outside the store chanting and shaking a stick with long strands over bowls of food upon an altar. Upon inquiring as to what was going on, you found that the ritual was a Shinto religious ceremony to celebrate the opening of a microcomputer store. The man was a priest asking the gods to bring the store owner good luck. Where did Shinto originate and is it similar in any way to religions such as Christianity or Judaism?

Although the written Japanese language is still largely a mystery, you have learned from your language instructor that there are three writing systems combined in one written language. Two of the systems were developed by the Japanese and one originated in China. Why did the Japanese mix Chinese and their own language?

The fact that part of written Japanese came from China raises another question in your mind about China and Japan. What other aspects of contemporary Japanese culture in addition to written language have been shaped by Chinese influences?

During your first week in Tokyo you walked near the palace where the emperor resides, you wondered when Japan acquired emperors. Did emperors possess throughout Japanese history the great powers of many European kings and queens?

You vaguely remember an American television show on the history of Japan in which someone called the *shogun*, assisted by a group of warriors

called *samurai*, ran the country. Whatever became of shoguns and samurai? Also, you discovered from talking with two Japanese friends that it is considered good form for the prime minister of Japan, whom you know to be an important politician, to keep a low profile and not make too many speeches on television. This leaves you confused. Who runs Japan? Why would a leading politician not desire constant publicity as most leading American politicians seem to enjoy.

All of these questions whirling around your brain (or at least in the brain of the young person in this book!) relate to aspects of contemporary Japanese culture that have been shaped by thousands of years of history. A study of Japan's past should help you to understand a few of the historical factors that have influenced modern Japan.

EARLY HISTORY: JOMON, YAYOI, AND YAMATO

People inhabited Japan as long as 30,000 years ago and continued to migrate there until the eighth century A.D. Immigrants to the archipelago came from Korea, China, and possibly further south in Asia. Many people probably arrived during the last ice age about 11,000 years ago when Japan was joined by land to the rest of Asia.

Archaeologists have used the art of the earliest culture to name the first period of Japanese prehistory. *Jomon* was a rope pressed into clay to form a design; the clay pot was then fired to imprint the design. Jomon is the name given to a people who from approximately 11,000 to 300 B.C. lived a simple nomadic lifestyle of hunting, fishing, and gathering edibles. Evidence of Jomon culture has been found from Okinawa to Hokkaido. The only surviving evidence of early Jomon culture are remains of their pottery used as containers, but more sophisticated implements from the late Jomon period (2500 B.C.), such as the remains of serving bowls, have been unearthed.¹

By approximately 300 B.C. in parts of the present-day islands of Kyushu and Honshu people were engaged in a much more sophisticated lifestyle than in the Jomon era. Most important, the people of the Yayoi Culture were assured a steady food supply because they adopted wet field or irrigated rice cultivation.² Agriculture enabled these early Japanese to build permanent communities and devote time to activities other than simply hunting for food. Even during these times China's influence was important since wet field rice cultivation almost certainly came to Japan from the Asian mainland.

¹ Joan Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), pp. 15–18.

² This culture derived its name from a pottery find at Yayoicho in Tokyo.

People during the Yayoi period produced a variety of implements including large jars and urns; used two other Chinese imports, bronze and iron, for making weapons; and established some sea trade with Korea and China. Surviving Chinese records reveal that representatives of that nation's government visited Japan as early as 57 A.D.³

In the Yayoi period and in the few hundred years that followed, Japanese political and religious institutions emerged that still exist. By the third century A.D. in Kyushu, and later Honshu, society had become so well organized that leaders were being buried in huge tombs built in the form of mounds or *tumuli*. These tumuli are so impressive that archaeologists have named this time the Tomb Period. Also, the arrival of military technology from the Asian mainland, particularly the skill of horse riding, enabled some powerful families to gain power through coalitions.

One such coalition, who lived in the Yamato region near present-day Osaka and Kyoto, was powerful enough to create what is regarded as the first identifiable Japanese government. The Yamato rulers, who later controlled all of modern Japan except Northern Honshu and Hokkaido, were in regular contact with the Chinese and built alliances with Korean rulers. Also, Yamato leaders, who were both male and female, established the principle of hereditary accession to the throne. These rulers were religious as well as political leaders.

By the time of the Yamato rulers, elements of what would later become the Shinto religion were already present. Shinto, which can be translated as "Way of the Gods," is uniquely Japanese. It has no founders, no sacred book, no teachers, no martyrs, and no saints. The religion is built around nature worship and the presence of spirits or *kami* in mountains, rocks, trees, streams, and even certain people. Many of the physical places where *kami* existed during the time of Yamato rulers are now the sites of Shinto shrines. Another major aspect of Shinto still present that dates back to the dawn of Japanese history is the emphasis on purification. Almost all Shinto ceremonies begin with the use of water. Values common to most Japanese today that originated in part through early religious practices include a love of bathing and deep reverence for nature.

Shinto also bequeathed a rich mythology to the Japanese people, with stories of gods and goddesses who possessed various magical powers. The Yamato rulers, who were originally priest-chiefs and later became the first Japanese emperors, claimed descent from Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess and a leading Shinto deity.⁴ It would not be until after World War II that

³ Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1981), p. 13.

⁴ The sun has played a central role in Japanese culture. The Japanese name for their country, Nippon, means "source of the sun." The Chinese name, Japan, which means the same thing, was adopted by Westerners.



As Shinto developed, shrines were built throughout Japan. Itsukushima Shrine, located on an island near the city of Hiroshima, was as popular in the 1890s when this photo was taken as it is today. Notice the Torii gate, which is a common feature of all Shinto shrines. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

the formal connection between the Japanese imperial family and the Shinto religion would be broken.

EARLY CHINESE INFLUENCES

An even more significant development than the beginnings of Shinto occurred in 552 A.D. The Buddhist religion, which originated in India and spread to China, eventually reached Korea and then Japan. According to legend, the Korean king, in the process of requesting Japanese military assistance, sent gifts to the Yamato rulers that included Buddhist scriptures, a statue of Buddha, and a letter of praise for the religion.

Although even in the 500s there were different Buddhist sects, common beliefs of Buddhism include the ideas that everyday life is an illusion, suffering is a result of human desires, and acts in previous lifetimes determine whether one must go through the painful cycle of rebirth.⁵

The introduction of Buddhism in Japanese culture not only had tremendous religious implications—today Buddhism and Shinto are the major Japanese religions—but helped to increase the level of general knowledge in Japan. Japanese Buddhist priests traveled to China for religious instruction and then returned to Japan with Chinese technology and ideas ranging from better tools and weapons to governmental innovations and philosophy.

As we know, China was already influencing Japanese culture before the introduction of Buddhism. For example, in addition to wet rice cultivation and iron and steel, Chinese writing had come to Japan earlier. Still, from the late 500s until 838 a Chinese-based knowledge explosion occurred as many Japanese were eager to learn from what was perhaps the world's most advanced civilization at the time.

The Japanese government sent at least nineteen separate missions to China between 600 and 838 A.D., with the large missions usually numbering more than 500 people and including official envoys, students, Buddhist monks, and translators.⁶ The trip was dangerous, and a miscalculation meant a ship would be lost in the seemingly endless Pacific Ocean. Many Japanese who braved the elements to reach China stayed for as long as 20 to 30 years. The fact that Japanese would undergo the hardships and risks of the trip to the Asian mainland reflects a characteristic of Japanese culture that has endured to the present: an almost insatiable desire for new knowledge.

⁵ H. Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture: A Short History* (New York: Praeger Inc., 1973), pp. 13–14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Buddhism and other ideas derived from the Chinese received a powerful boost from Prince Shotoku (593–622) of Japan. Shotoku was a strong advocate of the new religion and gave it official government approval. Although there was some opposition to Buddhism from other powerful families, the religion took root without the substantial bloodshed that has often accompanied the introduction of a new belief in many countries. Buddhism was popular among educated Japanese partially because it was known to be the religion of China, which was considered an advanced civilization. Also, because Shinto did not have the complex belief system of Buddhism, the native religion was not a great rival. Indeed, throughout Japanese history the two religions have coexisted remarkably smoothly. Many Shinto kami are regarded by Japanese as Buddhist deities in other forms. In contemporary Japan it is not uncommon to find Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines built together.

Early Chinese political influences were also important in the transformation of Japan from a land ruled by a clan to a country with an organized government. In 646 the Fujiwara family initiated the Taika Reforms. Taika means "Great change" and indeed Japan experienced substantial political changes because of the reforms. The intent of these reforms, most of which were modeled after the great Chinese T'ang Dynasty, was to remold the Japanese emperor along the lines of the all-powerful Chinese emperors and to create a centralized national government bureaucracy.

The separate domains ruled by clans became provinces, and Chinese taxation systems, law codes, and governmental structures were adopted. All agricultural land theoretically belonged to the Yamato emperor and was to be equally divided among the people. The national government was to be run by bureaucrats of varying ranks who were to earn their positions by merit.

Many of the principles behind political change were based on the writings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 B.C.), who had been widely studied in Japan for some time before the Taika Reforms. Much of Confucianism is largely practical advice, stressing the need for good government along with ethics, social hierarchy, harmony, duty, and respect for authority. Strong Confucianist influences can still be found in Japanese society today.

Even as many Chinese-based reforms took root, the Japanese, while adding innovations to the Chinese model, also avoided transferring aspects of China's political system that did not fit their culture. In Japan, unlike China, key government bureaucracy positions were often awarded to members of leading families rather than to deserving applicants. Although some Japanese emperors did have great power, the existence of powerful families throughout Japan, plus the imperial government's failure to gain control of agricultural lands, prevented the establishment of the tradition



Prince Shotoku, a strong proponent of Buddhism, built Horyuji Temple near Nara between 601 and 607 A.D. Horyuji is the oldest surviving monastic compound in Japan. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

of an all-powerful emperor, as in China. Japanese emperors throughout history have been symbolic leaders while others acting in the emperor's name have made important decisions. A major reason the Japanese imperial line is the longest in the world is that emperors have usually been too weak to threaten anyone yet are useful to the real leaders as sources of legitimacy or as useful national symbols.

Japan during the years of the Taika Reforms and afterward was affected by China in other ways than politics and religion. Chinese scholarship and literature were widely studied by educated Japanese. Japanese also adopted many Chinese techniques in weaving, lacquer ware, metalurgy, orchestral music, dance, architecture, sculpture, and painting.⁷

However, as in government and politics, the Japanese changed many Chinese practices to fit their own culture while rejecting other Chinese customs completely. Chinese food and eating habits were not accepted during this time in Japan. Even the emperor might have a Chinese-style palace but live in private quarters that would retain the Japanese tradition of cedar-bark roofs and pillars of plain, undecorated wood.⁸ As you study Japanese history, you will see numerous examples of the ease with which the Japanese have borrowed from other cultures while modifying or rejecting foreign ideas with which they were uncomfortable.

CLASSICAL JAPAN: NARA AND HEIAN

Soon after the Taika Reforms Japan's first permanent capital was established in 710 to the west of the modern city of Nara, which is today less than 30 minutes by car from Kyoto and Osaka. The capital city, called Heijo, which translates into "Capital of Peace and Tranquility," was laid out in checkerboard streets in direct imitation of the Ch'ang-an, the capital of the great T'ang dynasty in China. Today visitors by the thousands visit Japan's first capital to see examples of remaining T'ang architecture.

Shortly after the founding of the capital, the earliest two surviving Japanese books, the "Record of Ancient Matters" or *Kojiki* and the "Chronicles of Japan" or *Nihon Shoki*, were completed, in 712 and 720 respectively. These books contained both mythological accounts, such as the descent of the imperial family from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, and historical information. The "Record of Ancient Matters" attempted to use written Chinese to represent the Japanese language phonetically, but the "Chronicles of Japan" was written in conventional Chinese script. It would not be until the 800s that the Japanese people would devise their

⁷ Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), pp. 44-47.

⁸ Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art*, p. 50.

own written language to accompany the already centuries-old spoken Japanese.⁹

While the Japanese capital was located in Nara, one of the ancient world's greatest architectural projects was completed: the construction of the enormous Todaiji Temple, which contained the Great Buddha of Nara. The inspiration for this undertaking was provided by Emperor Shomu (724-756), who is remembered as perhaps the most devoutly Buddhist emperor in Japanese history. In 743 Shomu vowed to cast a massive Buddha statue and build a national center for his religion. An estimated 10 percent of the Japanese population contributed to the project, and 50,000 carpenters and over 370,000 metal workers were involved in construction. Shomu supposedly exhausted Japan's supply of bronze to build the statue.

The Great Buddha, over 52 feet high and housed in the world's largest building, was dedicated in 752 in what was the greatest ceremony to date in Japanese history. During the "eye-opening" an Indian priest painted in the pupils of the statue's eyes to bring it to symbolic life. Approximately 10,000 Buddhist priests were in attendance as well as many other visitors from foreign countries.¹⁰

It is ironic that Emperor Shomu's devotion probably did the Japanese government, and particularly imperial power, more harm than good as the costs of building the Todaiji Temple complex and the Great Buddha placed enormous strains on government finances. Also, after Todaiji was built the Buddhist temples that now surrounded Nara housed many priests who attempted to intervene regularly in political affairs. Partially because he feared the growing political influence of the great Nara temples, Emperor Kammu ordered the construction of a second capital city, Heian-kyo, 30 miles north of Nara. The city, completed in 794 and laid out on the checkerboard pattern of Chinese cities, later came to be known as Kyoto. Kyoto remained the imperial capital of Japan until 1868.¹¹

The time from the founding of the new capital until the late 1100s, which historians have named the Heian Period, was important to the development of Japan. The Fujiwara family, through such techniques as arranged marriages with the imperial family, continued to amass power while Japanese emperors were mostly figureheads. With notable exceptions, rule by Fujiwara regents brought internal peace to Japan while the remoteness of the island nation continued to prevent it from being invaded by a foreign power.

The imperial court aristocracy in Heian, which by the middle of the

⁹ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Accounts described in Stanley-Baker's *Japanese Art*, pp. 46-47 and Varley's *Japanese Culture*, pp. 24-25.

¹¹ Reischauer, *Japan*, p. 25.

ninth century was estimated to be 5,000 people out of a city of 100,000, were largely free of worry about military or economic problems and instead pursued beauty, love, and the fine arts.¹²

The nobility considered cultural refinement to be of vital importance, and both people and objects had to be pleasing to others. For example, not only did the nobility go to incredible lengths to dress well, but it was considered extremely bad form for an aristocrat even to allow his ox carriage driver to be poorly dressed. The following description of the dress of a Heian nobleman attending a court ceremony illustrates the importance placed upon appearance: "Michitaka wore a summer tunic with a violet mantle, laced violet trousers, underwear of deep red, and a stiff unlined brilliantly white overgarment. All gentlemen carried fans with them whose ribs were lacquered in various colors with paper of brilliant red."¹³

Heian ceremonial functions were extremely elaborate. At one major Buddhist temple dedication in 1022 the pond by the temple was decorated with hundreds of lotus blossoms, each of which contained a small Buddha. Jeweled nets were suspended from branches of plants around the pond. Boats were covered with gems the shape of trees while peacocks strutted near the temple. The temple hall was also adorned with gold, silver, and precious jewels.¹⁴

The Heian nobility also developed an appreciation for the written word as a medium of entertainment. For centuries the Japanese had no written language and educated people wrote Chinese. Because spoken Chinese and Japanese sounds were completely different, it was extremely difficult to write down spoken Japanese in Chinese. In the ninth and tenth centuries the Japanese took certain Chinese characters, greatly abbreviated them, and created a phonetic system for spoken Japanese. Eventually the Japanese developed a written syllabary, called *Kana*, which provided the basis for a written language.¹⁵

By the latter part of the tenth century members of the nobility were using Japanese to write books and poems. Many writers were women, since they enjoyed even more leisure time than men and because written Japanese was still considered less appropriate for educated men than Chinese. The most famous of all Heian literature, *The Tale of Genji*, was completed by Lady Murasaki early in the eleventh century. This novel,

¹² Conrad Totman, *Japan before Perry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 56.

¹³ George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 192-93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-77.

¹⁵ Description of development of language in Reischauer's *Japan*, pp. 31-32. More information about the Japanese language may be found in Chapter 7.

considered to be a masterpiece of world literature, reveals much of the life of the Heian nobility; the hero, Prince Genji, epitomizes what was considered to be good by Heian aristocrats. He is handsome, a thoughtful lover, a poet, and a musician, and he possesses impeccable taste.¹⁶

The development of a written Japanese language and literature and the establishment of Heian as a permanent capital were a few of many indicators that the Japanese were no longer a primitive people but had become the possessors of a sophisticated culture by the standards of the time. Also, the wave of Japanese enthusiasm for things Chinese clearly declined as time passed. Because of this decline in interest and because of domestic Chinese political problems, in 894 the Japanese government ceased sending missions to China. Over the next two centuries the Japanese had little contact with the continent compared with earlier times.

By the latter Heian Period the court nobility not only had less contact with the Chinese but they were also isolated from both common Japanese and from increasingly powerful rural families. As the central government asked for more and more taxes, many peasants in the provinces began to band together behind these rural lords. While the Fujiwaras and other aristocrats in the capital concerned themselves with the arts, powerful landowners were gaining experience managing large estates, amassing wealth, and becoming quite proficient at fighting on horseback. Political change was imminent.

MEDIEVAL JAPAN: KAMAKURA AND ASHIKAGA

As the influence of the Fujiwaras and the central government declined, two powerful provincial families, the Taira and Minamoto, warred against each other. In 1185, Yoritomo, the leader of the Minamoto family, defeated the Taira and the Fujiwaras and obtained military control of all of Japan. In 1192 Yoritomo forced the emperor to give him the hereditary title of chief general, or *shogun*.

Although Yoritomo's title implied that he was only the national government's leading general, he was in fact ruler of Japan. Yoritomo chose not to live in Kyoto, the imperial capital, but remained in his headquarters in the seaside town of Kamakura, located near the modern city of Tokyo. Yoritomo's headquarters in Kamakura became the center of power where Japanese brought legal problems and other matters of state. At the same time the weak imperial court and emperor continued to reign in Kyoto. The

¹⁶ Varley, *Japanese Culture*, pp. 46-47.

trend was established that those occupying official positions of power were, in fact, relatively powerless, and this situation is sometimes still true in contemporary Japan. This pattern of rule from behind the scenes became even more pronounced in 1199, when the powerful Hojo family destroyed the Minamoto shogun line. The Hojo family went on to dominate the government for over a century while supposedly only serving as regents to Fujiwaras and later to imperial princes.

Powerless emperors and struggles for control by contending families resulted in political power becoming decentralized in Japan.¹⁷ Yoritomo established a system whereby throughout Japan loyal warrior-administrators, later known as *samurai*, fulfilled many of the old imperial government functions. These samurai retained considerable power in the management of local affairs. As in Europe, medieval Japanese developed a feudal system in which landowners were responsible to overlords who, in turn, were often loyal to higher authorities.

Japanese feudalism came later than in Europe and remained longer. Although in Western Europe feudalism was declining by the 1400s, Japan retained some feudal characteristics until the mid-1800s. A few social scientists contend that evidence of feudal-based values such as extreme loyalty to a superior can still be found today in many Japanese.

The warrior class was the backbone of Japanese feudalism. By the late 1100s a general code of ethics for the samurai was already being observed, although it was not written down until much later. As in Europe, it was of vital importance that samurai learn techniques of war such as swordsmanship. As in Europe, heroism, honor, and loyalty were highly valued. The samurai, however, were particularly enamored with the last two characteristics. Honor of family name was something a samurai would die over, but loyalty to superiors was perhaps the most treasured of ideals.

Warriors did not usually question a superior's commands, and a warrior's obedience to a superior was expected regardless of family, all private interests, and even life itself. Thus one samurai, who had a reputation for being especially brave, was in danger from a robber and evaded the assailant in what seemed to be a cowardly manner. This samurai could not risk his life to protect his property because he needed to preserve himself to serve his lord. Yoritomo was once presented with the head of an opponent by a samurai who had sworn loyalty to the dead opponent. The founder of the Kamakura government eventually had the samurai executed for disloyalty.¹⁸

The samurai were also different from European noblemen in other

¹⁷ Political decentralization means central governmental authority is broken up and distributed among local areas.

¹⁸ Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334*, pp. 358-69.



The Great Buddha of Kotokuin Temple was built in 1252 during the Kamakura Period. The 37-foot-tall bronze image is Japan's second largest statue and attracts visitors from all over the world. Photo courtesy of Richard Rice.

interesting ways. Samurai, possibly because of the influence of Shinto, or because they were usually better educated than European lords, had an appreciation for beauty in nature that is a characteristic of many Japanese today. Also, self-discipline and the ability to persevere in the face of great adversity were characteristics of a large number of samurai, as is true of many Japanese today.

Many samurais' ability to focus the mind to exhibit self-discipline, as well as their appreciation for beauty, were in part stimulated by the popularity of Zen Buddhism among the Kamakura Japanese warrior-caste. Buddhism in general during the Kamakura years grew from a religion practiced by a few to a popular belief system. Many Buddhist sects that began in medieval Japan are still in existence today and traditional Japanese art forms such as the tea ceremony and flower arranging continue to be influenced by Zen.

Self-discipline and bravery were qualities very much in demand as Japan's middle ages were marked by much strife. One of the major crises in Japanese history occurred in the late 1200s as outside invaders threatened the archipelago. During this century Mongol nomads from the steppe lands north of China conquered Central Asia, southern Russia, parts of the Middle East and eastern Europe, Korea, and China. The Mongols tried twice to subdue Japan, sending a large seaborne force in 1274 and the biggest seaborne expedition in the world to date in 1281. During their first attempt the invaders landed in Japan but withdrew their fleet before fighting because of the threat of a severe storm.

During the second invasion, although the estimated 140,000 attackers enjoyed both superior equipment and a tremendous numerical advantage over the Japanese, a terrible typhoon destroyed the Mongol fleet directly off the coast of Kyushu. The Japanese looked upon this amazing luck as a sign that the gods had declared their island sacred from foreign invasion and named the typhoon *kamikaze* or "divine wind." This momentous event spawned a belief in the minds of many Japanese of the invulnerability of the home islands, and this belief would exist well into the twentieth century.¹⁹

The Kamakura system lasted a little over 50 years after the repulsion of the Mongol invaders. The Hojos were overthrown in 1333 by Emperor Go-Daigo, who attempted to revive direct imperial rule. In turn, Ashikaga Takauji, the leader of a powerful family who was an early imperial ally, later broke with Go-Daigo and installed a rival puppet emperor.²⁰ Shortly

¹⁹ Reischauer, *Japan*, pp. 49-51.

²⁰ Unlike the West, where family names are placed last, in Japan family names are used before an individual's given name. All names in the narrative are in Japanese order. In footnotes and suggested readings the Western format is used with Japanese names for the reader's convenience in finding sources.

afterward Go-Daigo escaped from Kyoto and established a second imperial court in Kyushu. From 1336 until 1392, when the Kyushu-based emperor was forced to abdicate, Japan had two sets of emperors. The Ashikagas, however, had seized political power and declared themselves hereditary shoguns.

Feudalism became more hierarchal during the Ashikaga Period (1333–1573) as feudal lords were responsible to more powerful provincial lords or *daimyo*, who in turn were theoretically responsible to the shogun. The actual situation during most of the Ashikaga years, however, was that power was even more decentralized than in the Kamakura era. Ashikaga shoguns were relatively weak while powerful families fought each other and the shogun for control of Japan.

The Ashikaga Period was marked by constant strife, including the bloody Onin War, which lasted from 1467 until 1477 and was fought all over Japan. During these confused years while the Ashikaga shogunate was virtually powerless, the emperors continued to reign but were often reduced to near poverty because they had no access to stable income. It is not surprising that the Ashikaga years are considered one of the darkest political times in Japan's history.

Political problems notwithstanding, in other human endeavors the Ashikaga Period was one of excitement and growth. The Ashikaga shoguns were quite interested in Zen Buddhism and the arts. Ashikaga shoguns, who were patrons of the arts, built in Kyoto the Golden and Silver Pavilions, two of the most beautiful temples in all Japan. Many world-famous aspects of Japanese culture, such as the tea ceremony and flower arranging, were fully developed during this period. Japanese art today often emphasizes the value of the natural over the artificial, irregular shaped pottery over the symmetrical, the small over the large, and the simple over the complex. These Japanese values were a lasting result of the refined artistic taste of the Ashikaga shoguns.²¹

Technological and economic progress also occurred in medieval Japan, in part because Japanese again began to meet and learn from foreigners. Although after 894 there had been no official government contact between Japan and China, during the mid-1100s the Japanese government began sending "tribute" to the Sung Chinese dynasty and receiving gifts in return from the Chinese court. By the Kamakura years Japan and China were engaged in an officially condoned and very lively trade. Japanese society was enriched by Chinese imports including silk, perfumes, sandalwood, porcelain, and copper coins, while Japanese swords, fans, and lacquer were highly prized in medieval China.²²

When Portuguese traders landed off southern Kyushu in 1543, Japan

²¹ Reischauer, *Japan*, p. 67.

²² Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334*, p. 423.



By the time Kaiho Yusho (1533–1615) painted "Pine and Plum by Moonlight," a pair of six panel screens, a distinctive Japanese artistic style had emerged accentuating the natural over the artificial and the simple over the complex. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (Nelson Fund).

was exposed to both technology and ideas that were significantly different from anything ever introduced from Asia. Japanese immediately became interested in European guns and in less than 25 years were manufacturing enough guns that in one battle between rival families the winning side had several thousand riflemen. Also the Portuguese and other Europeans who followed included priests and clergy, who viewed the Japanese as excellent candidates for eternal Christian salvation. The European clergy proceeded immediately to win converts.

ISOLATION AND PEACE: TOKUGAWA JAPAN

European influence, particularly new technology, served as a partial catalyst for political change in Japan. Only a few years after Europeans introduced guns to Japan, three powerful leaders—Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Iyasu—used advanced firepower to achieve brilliant military successes that resulted in the political unification of Japan.

In 1568 Oda Nobunaga and his forces occupied the imperial capital of Kyoto and took control of much of central Japan. Nobunaga allowed another Ashikaga shogun to claim the office in name only, but later he quarreled with Ashikaga Yoshiaki, the fifteenth Ashikaga shogun, and in 1573 he forced the shogun from office, ending forever the Ashikaga family claim to the shogunate.²³ Nobunaga, although he installed a member of another family as puppet shogun, was in control. Nobunaga was extremely ruthless in attempting to unify Japan; in one major Buddhist stronghold that opposed him, he killed every man, woman, and child.

Nobunaga eventually took control of all of central Japan but was murdered by an aide in 1582. With Japan again threatened by civil war, a second powerful leader emerged. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a man who rose from peasant origins to become Nobunaga's chief general, first successfully defeated rival daimyo and, after subduing Kyushu and Honshu, gained control of all of Japan in 1590. Hideyoshi was by all accounts extremely intelligent and much more tactful than Nobunaga. While in power, he reorganized the government and dispatched an army to attempt the conquest of Korea. Hideyoshi, because of his lower-class background, did not claim the title of shogun but instead had himself named chancellor by the emperor.

When Hideoyshi died in 1598, he left a young son as an heir and a group of five powerful daimyo as collective regents. The daimyo soon

²³ Taro Sakamoto, *Understanding Japan 47: The Japanese Emperor through History* (Tokyo: The International Society for Educational Information, Inc., 1984), pp. 47–48.

divided among themselves and the most powerful of the five, Tokugawa Ieyasu, after winning the battle of Sekigahara near Kyoto in 1600, attained virtual mastery of Japan. Tokugawa, whose original power base was a huge fief that included Edo (modern Tokyo), by 1615 defeated his last opponents at Osaka castle. A superb military man and a prudent and painstaking administrator and politician, Tokugawa Ieyasu assumed the title of hereditary shogun in 1603 by claiming descent from Minamoto Yoritomo. Therefore not only did Tokugawa reunify Japan, but his heirs would occupy the shogunate for over 250 years.

Tokugawa Ieyasu and his heirs, ruling from Edo, controlled a system that included a strong central government and three descending ranks of daimyo who lived throughout Japan. Elite hereditary daimyo also served on several councils that, with the shogunate, shared governance of Japan. Daimyo were required in alternate years to reside in Edo so that the shogun could control them, and as an added precaution certain members of daimyo families were required to reside in Edo year-round. Meanwhile, the emperor remained in Kyoto. Although Japanese emperors still had no appreciable political power, they continued to be important living symbols of the nation.

Tokugawa Japan was characterized by rather rigid divisions between social groups. At the top were the samurai, who constituted about 7 percent of the total population. Only samurai could bear weapons and they could not marry into the lower classes. Below the samurai were the peasants, because they produced food which was considered to be the real wealth of the country. Below the peasants were the artisans. Because the merchants were viewed as nonproducing parasites, this group had the lowest status in Tokugawa Japan. However, as time passed and the merchant class accumulated more and more wealth, it was impossible for their influence to be restrained.

During the Tokugawa years Japan again turned away from foreign influences. In fact, for over 200 years, from the mid-1600s until the mid-1800s, Japan remained virtually isolated from the rest of the world.

Religious ideas and fear of economic and political domination were the reasons behind the official Tokugawa policy of seclusion, which took effect sometime about 1640. Before then for a time Christianity and trade with Europeans flourished. By the 1500s several daimyo encouraged their subjects to adopt Christianity, because either they believed in the new religion or they desired more trade with the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Dutch who came to Japan. It is estimated that in 1580, there were 150,000 Christian converts in Japan, a larger percentage of the nation than is the case today.²⁴

²⁴ Reischauer, *Japan*, pp. 87-88.

However, leaders such as Hideoyshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu feared the Europeans and Christianity for several reasons. These rulers felt that Christians, particularly Catholics, could not be completely trusted as loyal Japanese because their true allegiance would be to an outsider such as the pope. Also, the Japanese leadership were aware that the Spanish, under the guise of Christianity, had conquered the Philippines. The Buddhist religious establishment was quick to support anti-Christian sentiments since they viewed the new religion as a threat. From 1597 until the late 1630s the government persecuted and executed thousands of Christians.

By 1640 the government had abolished Christianity, except in some isolated Kyushu communities. Also the Tokugawa seclusion policies limited the only contact Japanese could have with foreigners to a few Chinese and Dutch traders who were allowed to conduct business in Nagasaki. No Japanese were allowed to travel abroad and any Japanese living overseas were forbidden to return. After the 1600s Japan remained for the most part isolated from the outside world until the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵

Even though Japan was largely cut off from the world, in Tokugawa society the arts, certain kinds of economic development, and learning in areas other than science were in some ways equal or superior to that of the United States or Western Europe during the same period. The Japanese city became the focal point for many advances as Edo grew to over one million people by the 1700s. In addition to the great urban areas of Osaka and Kyoto, there were approximately 250 other small cities with populations ranging from 3,000 to 20,000.²⁶

Tokugawa art forms are still treasured throughout Japan and the world. Wood block prints or *ukiyo-e*, which featured beautiful women, actors, and scenes of travelers and natural geographic beauty, became popular during the Tokugawa era. Kabuki theater, in which the all-male performers engaged in exciting dramas featuring lovers as well as samurai heroics, also was popular. Although the Japanese had been interested in poetry for centuries, the 17-syllable haiku, which in a few words often suggests entire worlds for readers, originated in early Tokugawa times.

The peaceful and tranquil Tokugawa years allowed the Japanese economy to expand. Because the country was unified, trade grew throughout all of Japan and some members of the merchant class acquired enormous fortunes through such activities as wholesaling, retailing, and banking. The use of money, always an indicator of economic sophistication, became widespread in Tokugawa Japan.

Both cultural and economic development were in part due to the

²⁵ Accounts of the closing of Japan taken from Totman's *Japan before Perry*, pp. 146-47, and Reischauer's *Japan: The Story of a Nation*, pp. 87-89.

²⁶ Totman, *Japan before Perry*, pp. 189-95.

spread of formal learning throughout Japan during Tokugawa times. The daimyo maintained schools for the offspring of samurai, and commoner children attended schools operated by Buddhist temples, merchants, wealthy farmers, and local teachers. It is estimated that by the mid-nineteenth century 40 percent of all men and 10 to 15 percent of women in Japan were literate, making Japan one of the world's best-educated nations at the time.²⁷

Despite advances, the isolation of Japan from the rest of the world led to some stagnation, particularly in science and technology. Also other nations took a dim view of Japan's isolationist policies. Eventually Japan's isolation would be a major reason for the collapse of the Tokugawa government. Although the shogunate endured for fifteen more years, the real death knell for Tokugawa Japan sounded when Matthew Perry and his U.S. Navy fleet steamed into what is now Tokyo Bay in July 1853.

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Shinto
- Buddhism
- *The Tale of Genji*
- Shogun
- Samurai
- Kamikaze
- Heian (Kyoto)
- Tokugawa Ieyasu
- Seclusion policies

Review Questions

1. In your own words in a short paragraph describe beliefs and practices of Shinto.
2. In your own words in two or three sentences cite specific examples of China's influence upon the early development of Japan.
3. Explain in two or three sentences the following statement, and include specific examples from the text in your answer: Early Japanese history was characterized by emperors who reigned rather than ruled.
4. Based on what you read of the Tokugawa Period and your prior knowledge of world history, would you or would you not characterize the Japan of the mid-nineteenth century as a backward nation by world standards? Defend your answer in two or three sentences.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 175-76.



Commodore Matthew Perry, depicted above by an unknown nineteenth-century Japanese artist, and his U.S. navy squadron ended over 200 years of Japanese isolation by sailing into Tokyo Bay in summer 1853. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Essay Question

1. In a one- to two-page essay compare and contrast the early history of Japan and of the United States. Use the founding of Nara and the Massachusetts Bay Colony as points in time to begin your essay. End your essay with the arrival of Admiral Perry and the beginning of the American Civil War.

In-Depth Learning

1. Most if not all of traditional Japanese art forms were developed during Japan's early history. Dating back to early Tokugawa Japan, haiku poetry is still popular today. The poems are all in a fixed 17-syllable form and usually point to certain things in nature. Haiku poems characteristically consist of bare word pictures that often stimulate deep feelings in readers. Read the following two haiku from Japanese master haiku poets and write about and/or discuss with other members of the class what mental images and feelings they evoke. If you are so inclined, you might wish to try your hand at composing haiku verse.

Fields and mountains
All taken by the snow;
Nothing remains.

—Joso

Violets
By the mountain path:
There's something humble about them

—Basho

2. Religious and philosophical traditions, usually dating back to the early history of a culture, continue to influence the thoughts and actions of modern people. Two such traditions that continue to influence modern Japanese are Zen Buddhism and Confucianism. The following are suggested activities whereby you and/or other members of your class can become more familiar with these topics.
 - Interview a Japanese in your community about either topic. Be sure to ask the interviewee his or her opinion as to whether Zen Buddhism and/or Confucianism affects the way Japanese today think or feel.
 - Invite an outside resource person who has expertise on either topic to speak to the class.
 - For extra credit, research and write a report outlining the major tenets of either Zen or Confucianism. Summarize your findings and present them orally to your class.
 - Many Japan specialists assert that Confucianism continues to influence Japanese education, family relations, and attitudes toward savings while Zen influences Japanese artistic tastes and feelings about self-discipline. Research either subject with these propositions in mind.
 - Both Confucianism and Zen were transmitted to Japan from China. Prepare

a short written or oral report on the development of either of these traditions in China and their transmission to Japan.

FURTHER READING

If you are especially interested in early Japanese history, you might wish to read either George Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1964), or Conrad Totman's *Japan Before Perry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). These two books emphasize political, economic, and military history. If Japanese art and culture interest you, the following two books are highly recommended; Joan Stanley-Baker's *Japanese Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), and Paul Varley's *Japanese Culture: A Short History* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

C H A P T E R



F O U R

**MODERN
HISTORY**

THE MEIJI ERA: JAPAN ENTERS THE MODERN WORLD

On that July morning in 1853, according to eyewitness accounts, there was an uproar when news spread throughout the city of Edo that four American warships had sailed into the bay. Mothers took children and fled to the hills, warriors grabbed weapons to fend off attack, people went to temples to pray, and others removed their most precious valuables from the city. Throughout the Tokugawa era Japanese were taught to think of foreigners as barbarians or monsters, a fact that explains why the American arrival caused such panic.¹

Even though the 1853 American visit was peaceful, few events in Japanese history have proven as significant as Commodore Perry and his "Black Ships," which began a new age for Japan. In the years since Perry's visit, Japan has been the first Asian nation to modernize, attain world power status, lose a disastrous war, and recover to develop a democratic government and one of the most important economies in the world.

Despite what the future would bring, the Japan of Perry's time did not even enjoy regional influence, since the Tokugawas closed Japan to the rest of the world for over 200 years. By the 1850s the Americans were determined to use force if necessary to change Japanese policy.

The United States was interested in opening Japan for several reasons. Our government wanted to expand its Pacific trade and Japan was considered both an excellent fueling station for China-bound ships and a lucrative potential market. Also, the American government was quite concerned about the fate of sailors who were cast ashore in Japan. Finally, as had been the case earlier with Portuguese, Dutch, and English visitors, Christian evangelists in the United States felt a responsibility to convert the Japanese.

During his first short visit Perry presented U.S. government demands to the Japanese. Japan would sign a treaty opening ports to American ships, provide for the repatriation of shipwrecked American sailors, and allow the American government to establish consulates. The American commodore, after promising to return the following spring with a larger and more formidable fleet, left Japanese waters on July 17, 1853.²

Perry's ultimatum caused turmoil within the Japanese government, and a debate raged in the months that followed over what the appropriate Japanese response should be to this foreign threat. Although there were

¹ James Huffman, "Perry and the Opening of Japan," Article 16, in Thomas H. Britt, ed., *Japan: The Changing Tradition* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Mid-America, 1978).

² Britt, *Japan: The Changing Tradition*, p. 53.

some within the Tokugawa government who wanted to fight, when Perry returned in the spring of 1854 the Japanese offered no resistance. Tokugawa leaders were painfully aware of the primitive state of Japanese military technology compared with Perry's warships and reluctantly signed a treaty that met most American demands.

In honor of the Kanagawa Treaty, the Americans presented gifts to the Japanese including a model railroad with one-half mile of track, a telegraph set, eight baskets of Irish potatoes, farm tools, and 100 gallons of whiskey. The Japanese in turn gave the Americans silks, lacquerware, and porcelains. American sailors during the treaty celebration entertained their hosts with folk songs while the Japanese responded with a sumo wrestling demonstration for their guests.³

Japan's leaders, however, were in no real mood to celebrate, and the debate continued over future policy toward the United States and other Western countries. The Americans were not completely happy with the Kanagawa Treaty either, since the right to trade with Japan was not included, and began almost immediately pressuring the Japanese for trading concessions. Anti-foreign elements, including Emperor Komei and a group of young samurai, urged the government not to grant trading rights to the United States. Nevertheless, in 1858 the Tokugawa government signed a trade treaty despite these strong objections.

The Harris Treaty, named after the American diplomat who negotiated it, did far more than simply open Japan for trade. It placed Japan, for the first time in history, under the partial control of foreign powers as Americans, and later Dutch, Russians, British, and French obtained not only trading rights but the power to determine the tariff amounts for all imports without consulting the Japanese. Western powers set very low tariffs on the products they attempted to sell in Japan, thereby limiting Japan's ability to control its own economic destiny.

Furthermore, the United States and European powers were granted the right of extraterritoriality, which meant that foreign residents were subject to their own rather than Japanese law. The shogunate's decision to acquiesce to foreign demands, although practical considering Japan's military weakness, proved to be a major reason for the overthrow of the Tokugawa government a few years later.

By the mid-1800s the Tokugawa government was in trouble over domestic as well as foreign issues. Although public expenditures exceeded revenues, the government seemed incapable of developing adequate measures to derive more income from the growth sectors of the economy:

³ Accounts of the treaty celebration taken from Kenneth Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1978), p. 52, and Huffman, "Perry and the Opening of Japan."



Japanese in the 1800s considered Westerners strange and unattractive. In this drawing by a Japanese artist of a U.S. naval officer in Perry's squadron, the subject is depicted as having a long nose, a common perception of Japanese about Westerners. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

business and manufacturing. This chronic revenue shortage forced the government to cut back as much as 50 percent the monies paid to samurai. By the latter Tokugawa Period, some samurai were living in such austere circumstances that they were reduced to pawning family armor and even putting babies to death to avoid economic destitution.

Also, as education became more widespread in Tokugawa Japan, increasing numbers of people became unhappy with the rigid class system. Many merchants and manufacturers felt discriminated against because even though they might attain great wealth, they were still considered socially inferior to the samurai. Lower-ranking samurai, in turn, were discontented with the system because high-ranking samurai, regardless of their qualifications, were automatically awarded upper-level government positions.⁴

By the 1860s a group of younger samurai and commoners, adopting the battle cry *sonno-joi*, "revere the emperor and repel the barbarians," were plotting to use the throne as a symbol in an attempt to overthrow the Tokugawa government. Early in 1868 anti-government forces took over the shogun's Kyoto palace and induced the fifteen-year-old emperor to issue a decree establishing a new imperial government.

Although the Tokugawa government resisted, there was such a general lack of support for the old regime that in April 1868 the revolutionaries forced the government army to surrender. Thus two and one-half centuries of Tokugawa rule ended in less than six months in a relatively bloodless revolution. The new emperor, who from the beginning served as a national symbol rather than an actual leader, took the reign name Meiji, or "peace and enlightenment." Meiji has also become the name for the period of Japanese history from 1868 until 1912.

The small group of men who would go on to modernize Japan were unusual in several respects. The Meiji leaders, mainly lower-ranking but well-educated samurai, were extremely young. In 1868 the average age of top leaders in the new government was only 30. A majority of top Meiji leaders, despite much earlier rhetoric about driving foreigners from Japan, were quite pragmatic and understood the value of Western knowledge. Temporarily at least, Japan was dependent upon the West if it was to build a modern economy, a strong military, and efficient political and social institutions. Once these goals were obtained, Japan might then rid itself of the unequal treaties and regain control of its own destiny.

The Meiji leaders first had to establish their authority throughout Japan, which meant drastic reform of Tokugawa governmental structures and taxation systems. By 1871 the new government had transformed the old Tokugawa domains into new administrative units called prefectures.

⁴ Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 36-45.

During the Tokugawa era farmers had been allowed to pay taxes in rice rather than money, and rates were based on annual harvests instead of land values. Therefore the old tax system made it impossible for government to plan expenditures in advance. In 1873 the government solved this problem by requiring that all taxes be paid in money and by basing annual collections on land value rather than harvests.

Payments to samurai, which were a tremendous burden to the Tokugawa government, were first reduced and eventually terminated in 1876 when the government converted the payments to interest-bearing non-renewable bonds. The government in the same year ended the Tokugawa class system by abolishing all samurai privileges including the exclusive right to bear swords and special access to education and bureaucratic offices.

Economic as well as political change was vital if Japan was to deal with the West as an equal. Western expert Kanda Kohei wrote early in the Meiji years: "The nations that depend on business are always rich while those that depend on agriculture are always poor. Therefore the Eastern countries are always poor and the Western ones always rich."⁵

Japan by the 1870s was going through revolutionary economic changes. The Meiji government in the beginning played a strong role in economic development, particularly in assisting in the importation of Western expertise and technology. Yet the government also supported businessmen, because Meiji leaders believed that strong private enterprise was a necessity if Japan hoped to approach the wealth of such countries as the United States and Great Britain.

Remaining Tokugawa internal trade barriers and most export restrictions were abolished as the government encouraged Japanese business to sell rice, copper, and raw silk abroad. The government, in order to build the communications and transportation networks vital to any sophisticated economy, engaged in a widespread railroad and telegraph building program. Japan's first railroad line, which connected Tokyo and Yokohama, was completed in 1872 and by the turn of the century 5,000 miles of railroad track had been laid. By 1880 all major Japanese cities were linked by telegraph. The government also played a leading role in the construction of textile, ceramics, cement, and glass factories, as well as mines, shipyards, and arsenals. Later the Meiji government sold factories to private businessmen.⁶

By the late 1880s and early 1890s Japan's strategy of government-

⁵ Peter Duus, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 83.

⁶ Accounts of the events leading up to the Meiji Restoration and the early Meiji years taken from Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 35-88, and Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 64-86.

aided business development was beginning to pay off. Tea and silk export profits were providing capital for industrial growth, and textile factories were supplying Japanese needs and earning profits in international markets as well. Even though as late as 1902 only 14 percent of the Japanese workforce were employed in industry, the foundation for a modern economy was firmly in place.⁷

The new government also viewed education as a major priority. Although a variety of schools flourished under the Tokugawa, the Meiji leaders recognized several advantages for Japan in the creation of a national educational system. More educated people were needed for the new factories and government offices, and a national school system could be used to promote loyalty to the government.

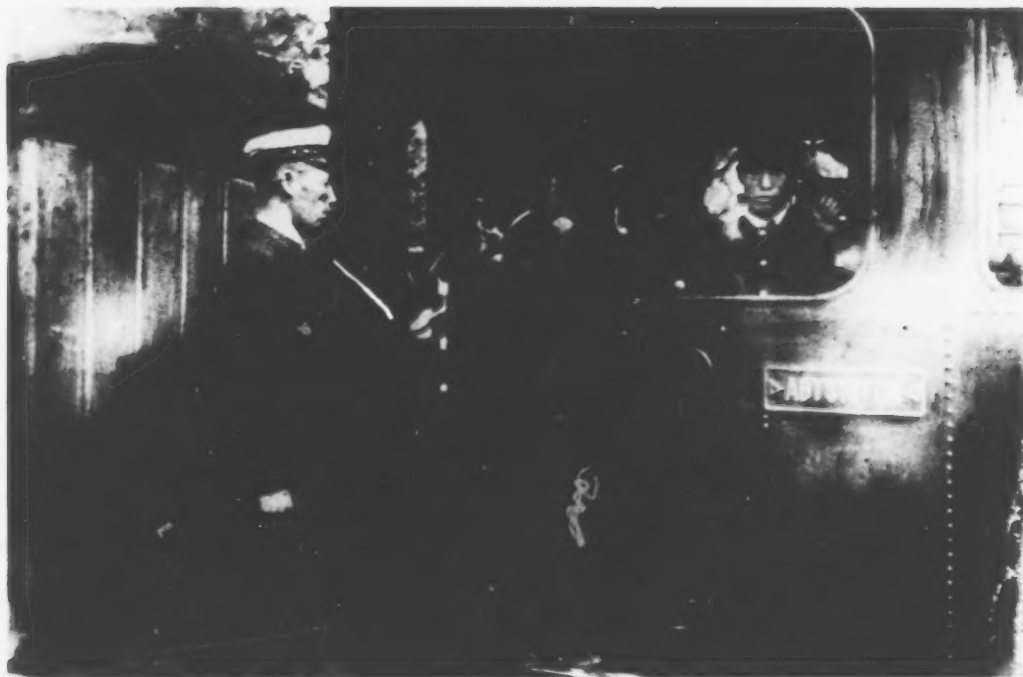
In 1872 a national educational system was created and elementary education made compulsory. The government at first allowed Japanese children to leave school after 16 months, but by 1886 the amount of required time in school was raised to four years. From the beginning the Meiji government used the highly centralized French system as an administrative model, but in the early years American curriculum, textbooks, and methods of teacher training were influential in Japanese elementary schools.

Western countries during the early Meiji years were as great a source of knowledge and model for Japan as Imperial China had been in earlier times. The Japanese absorbed a tremendous amount of information from the West in areas such as philosophy, government, military technology, and even popular culture.

The Meiji political leadership encouraged the systematic study of a variety of Western institutions by paying foreigners handsome salaries to come to Japan and serve as advisors and teachers and by sending Japanese abroad. For example, the government sent five men to Washington, D.C., where they spent six to seven days a week for six months studying our engraving bureaus, mints, and banks. The Japanese then returned to their country to supervise the creation of an improved banking and currency system.

Western ideas were popular in the 1870s among large numbers of ordinary Japanese citizens, particularly in the cities. Many Japanese believed that one tactic that would eventually cajole the Western powers to modify the unequal treaties was to convince foreigners that the Japanese were becoming "civilized and enlightened." Other Japanese even came to believe that the West was a superior civilization compared with Asia. During the early Meiji years children were even taught a "Civilization Ball

⁷ Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 136-53.



Japan by the 1890s, when this photo was taken, had already developed the beginnings of a train system that today is one of the most efficient in the world. Notice the Western attire of all the railroad personnel. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Song" in which they bounced a ball and named one item of civilization for each bounce.⁸

Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the leading popularizers of Western ideas, attracted thousands of readers by arguing in books and magazine articles that Western civilization was advanced because of the accentuation by Americans and Europeans upon individualism, self-reliance, and free enterprise. Fukuzawa and other proponents of Western ideas seriously questioned traditional Japanese values. For example, in an old Confucian story used to illustrate the virtues of respect and self-sacrifice for one's parents, a dutiful son doused himself with rice wine and slept at the foot of his parents' bed to attract mosquitoes, thereby keeping them off his parents. Fukuzawa ridiculed the hero by claiming it would have been much simpler to use Western technology, the mosquito net, than to go through such pain! Western books, particularly those promoting self-help and "success secrets" of the West, were best sellers in Japanese cities in the 1870s and 1880s.⁹

Many Japanese also were quite attracted to Western habits and fads. Meat eating, long prohibited by Buddhist doctrine, gained in popularity while some urban Japanese began wearing Western clothes and buying diamond rings, gold watches, and even knitted underwear. The use of English, and particularly English billboards, began in Tokyo. Because English was a new language to the Japanese, the translations could be humorous. A billboard above one barber shop read "heads cut" while a sign over an egg shop read "extract of fowl."¹⁰

The spread of Western ideas had important ramifications for Japanese politics and government. When the new government was created, a small group of leaders ruling as oligarchs were in control. However, in the 1870s and 1880s some Japanese, thanks to the publication in Japan of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and other Western works on politics, became attracted to democratic ideas. Support grew in Japan for such political changes as the creation of a popularly elected national legislature and the adoption of a constitution. Although the majority of Meiji leaders viewed these democratic sentiments as a threat to their power, the idea of a constitution was attractive to some powerful factions within and outside government.

Those in government who supported the creation of a constitution felt that the formulation and implementation of a constitution would give Japan great status with the West since no Asian country to date had progressed so far politically. Also a number of Meiji leaders viewed the

⁸ Huffman, "Western Fad," Article 17, in Britt, *Japan: The Changing Tradition*.

⁹ Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 87-90.

¹⁰ Huffman, "Western Fad."

creation of a constitution as a great aid in achieving national unification and increasing governmental authority.

Japan's leaders were particularly interested in Germany's constitution because that country had only recently undergone unification; Ito Hirobumi, one of the original Meiji leaders, traveled there to study. Upon returning from Europe, Hirobumi wrote a constitution which was implemented by imperial decree in 1889, making Japan the first Asian country to adopt constitutional government. It is important to understand, however, that although the constitution gave power to factions other than just the Meiji oligarchs, it by no means created a democratic Japan.

The constitution provided for a bicameral legislative assembly or Diet, with power to enact legislation and debate and approve the annual budget. The House of Peers consisted of appointed members while the House of Representatives were elected. However, only one percent of the 1890 population (male taxpayers above a set level) could vote in legislative elections. The cabinet, which consisted of a number of original architects of the Meiji revolution, was quite powerful and for many years later determined who would be the Japanese premier, or prime minister.

It was understood that although the emperor was given constitutional authority to appoint all top officials, he would act only in accordance with the wishes of Meiji leaders who served in the cabinet or on the privy council. Even though the Meiji leaders remained influential, they did not control the army, which, by constitutional law, reported only to the emperor. In the early 1930s the constitutional autonomy of the military would prove to be fatal to Japanese democracy.

The Meiji constitution, along with other reforms such as a national school system and the creation of a permanent bureaucracy staffed almost completely upon merit, contributed greatly to an increase in government power and to the unification of Japan.¹¹

At approximately the same time as the formulation of the constitution, opposition to Western influences was growing in Japan. Increasing numbers of Japanese, particularly conservatives and rural residents, worried that the country might be becoming too much like the West. Just as was the case earlier in Japanese history, the country went through a period when foreign ideas and customs were in vogue, followed by a resurgence of interest in more Japanese aspects of the culture. Also by the late 1880s the government was encouraging opposition to some Western ideas such as democracy because these were considered too liberal.

The national government used both the Shinto religion and the schools to promote nationalism. In an effort to use education to indoctrinate

¹¹ Duus, *Rule of Modern Japan*, pp. 120-35.

nate the Japanese people in love of the nation, the government made the teaching of Confucianism and loyalty to the emperor and to the Japanese state a central function of the schools. The emperor was described in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education as being "coeval with heaven and earth," and his photograph was placed in every school in Japan. The indoctrination over the years appeared to be working. There were much publicized cases of school principals who committed suicide after failing to rescue the emperor's photograph during a fire. Also, as Japan began to exert her new power in international politics, the government enjoyed enthusiastic support and absolute loyalty from the majority of citizens.¹²

In the latter nineteenth century Japan followed the lead of the European powers and the United States and engaged in imperialism, or the use of military force to gain territories and foreign markets. The Japanese government moved toward imperialism for several reasons, including a desire for equality with the West (which in 1894 was partially achieved when Western powers agreed to sign treaties ending extraterritoriality), and a desire for access to East Asian raw materials and markets. The Japanese were also concerned that because the governments of nearby countries were weak, Western powers would gain control over Japan's neighbors and eventually threaten the home islands.

Korea, a country that had been loosely controlled by the Chinese empire for centuries, was the major cause for the Meiji government's first foreign war. In 1894 the Japanese, fearful that Korea might be taken over unless the country had a stronger protector, went to war with and quickly defeated China. Then, through an 1895 treaty with China, Japan secured Korean independence, Formosa, the Pescadores islands, and the Liaotung Peninsula in Southern Manchuria.

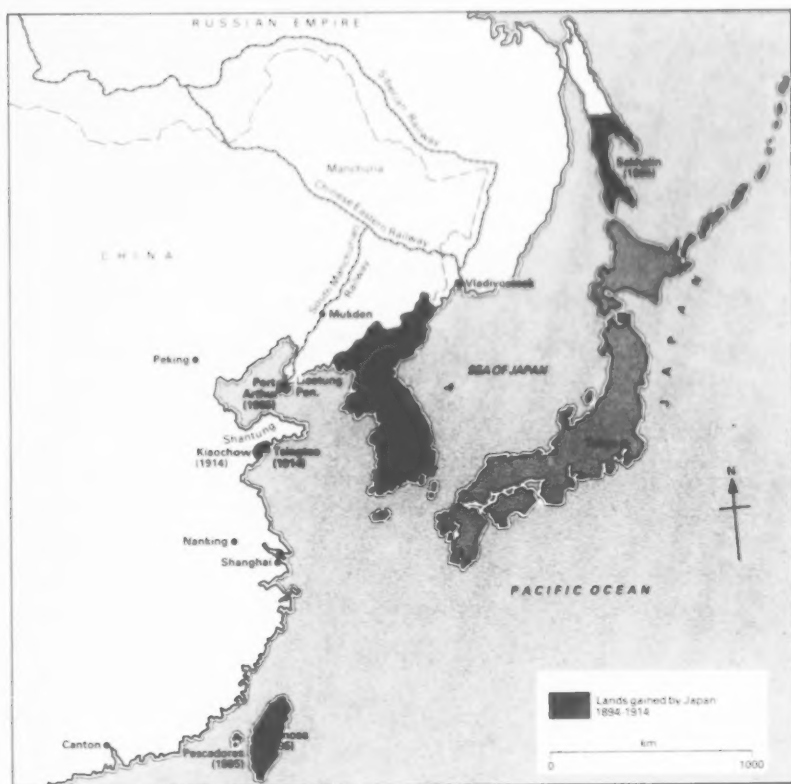
The war had been wildly popular in Japan, and as a result of Japan's victory a new national self-confidence emerged. It was quickly deflated by foreign powers, however. Russia, in league with France and Germany, forced Japan to give the Liaotung Peninsula back to China. Japan was further humiliated when Russia shortly afterward obtained a 99-year lease on Liaotung.

The Japanese now viewed Russia, which had territorial ambitions in Manchuria as well as in Korea, as a major threat. In 1902 Japan prepared itself for war with Russia by successfully negotiating with Great Britain the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the first military alliance in history between a Western and a non-Western country. Each country committed itself to the defense of the other if it were attacked by more than one country. The

¹² Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 99-101.

alliance placed Japan in a position to engage Russia militarily without fear of attack by other European powers.

In 1904, after negotiations over Korea broke down, Japan engaged Russia in war by a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. Most military observers thought Imperial Russia would win the war easily. Events proved the experts wrong, however. The Japanese army won several land victories and in May 1905 the Japanese fleet under Admiral Togo attracted world attention by defeating the Russian navy in the Straits of Tsushima. Shortly afterward Japan and Russia agreed to allow U.S.



The Growth of Japanese Imperialism, 1894–1914. Japan followed the lead of some non-Asian nations and built an empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Did the United States also engage in imperialism in this period of history?

President Theodore Roosevelt to arrange a treaty. Japan emerged from the Treaty of Portsmouth in September 1905 clearly at an advantage. The Japanese secured the southern half of Sakhalin Island, a leasehold on the Liaotung Peninsula, and Russian railroad holdings in Manchuria. The Russians also recognized Japan's paramount interest in Korea.

Japan, in just over three decades, astounded world geopolitical observers by changing from an isolated and, in some ways, backward country to a regional power with an empire that extended into the Asian mainland. Domestically, Japanese leaders' efforts to increase patriotism among the public through education and other means were successful, as most people were even more enthusiastic about Japan's two foreign wars than was the government. In fact, Japanese public opinion was so against the treaties ending the wars with China and Russia, because Japan was perceived as shortchanged, that the cabinets at the time were forced to resign.

During this heady time both the Japanese government and many citizens developed two beliefs that later led to much trouble. Japanese came to feel that their country had a mission to protect and civilize "backward" Asian nations. These imperial ambitions ran counter to an emerging strong desire on the part of people in other Asian countries for freedom from domination by Western colonial powers, or any nation, including Japan. Many Japanese also began to believe their military was invincible, a feeling that would help create a climate conducive to a series of unrealistic, and ultimately disastrous, government decisions.¹³

THE TAISHO ERA: PROGRESS AND RISING DISCONTENT

In summer 1912 the Meiji Era ended with the emperor's death, which was deeply mourned by most Japanese. On the day of the funeral the nation was further rocked by the dual ritual suicides of Russo-Japanese War hero General Nogi and his wife who, in the tradition of classic samurai, followed their lord even in death. The public, by and large, viewed the Nogis' act as one of absolute purity and selflessness and worthy of the highest admiration. There was also a sense, among the outpouring of emotions, that an old age was indeed passing and that Japan's future was uncertain.¹⁴

The new emperor gave the name Taisho, or "Great Righteousness,"

¹³ Accounts of the rise of Japanese imperialism taken from Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 120-35; Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 103-18; and Britt, *Japan: The Changing Tradition*, pp. 120-23.

¹⁴ Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 119.

to the years between 1912 and 1926. He was an obscure ruler who was physically weak and frequently ill. Nevertheless, the times proved to be quite exciting as Japan continued to develop economically, experimented with democracy, and became a major actor on the stage of world politics.

Yet Japan faced a number of problems in the Taisho years. Economic development was impressive but quite erratic. Because European powers were preoccupied with World War I from 1914 to 1918, Japan with a much smaller role in the war began to sell products to other Asian nations that had been markets for British, French, or German goods. However, the European recapture of markets after fighting ended contributed in part to a major Japanese postwar recession. Also, by the early 1920s increased demand by heavy industry exhausted Japan's scarce domestic supplies of raw materials such as coal. If Japan's economy was to experience continued growth, dramatically increased access to cheap raw materials was a necessity.

Also different economic and social lifestyles caused much value conflict during the Taisho years, particularly between rural and urban people. While Japan impressed the world with the adoption of constitutional government, many among the educated urban class wanted a more democratic political system. Also the tremendous popular support for military victories and the lack of constitutional limitations on the army and navy meant that later in the 1930s the military often had the support to override the politicians.

The Taisho years witnessed technical advances in every field, and the standard of living of average Japanese families more than doubled. The growth of *Zaibatsu* or "money cliques" was a major reason for this economic growth. Since the Meiji Period the government had channeled financial aid to those who were believed to be best able to build a strong national economy. A few powerful families used government assistance and keen business acumen to build economic empires.

By the early twentieth century four *Zaibatsu*—Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, and Yasuda—were the largest economic enterprises in Japan and controlled a variety of enterprises including banking, manufacturing, mining, and foreign trade concerns. While the *Zaibatsu* served the government's needs by fueling economic growth, particularly in heavy industries vital for defense, much of the public became increasingly concerned over the great political influence of the *Zaibatsu* and the tremendous concentration of wealth in the hands of a few powerful families.

Life for employees in these large industrial concerns became increasingly good during the Taisho years. Some male managers and industrial workers were given the benefits of lifetime employment in exchange for loyalty and service to one large firm. By the 1920s and 1930s middle-class boys all over Japan aspired to be a *salariman* ("salary man") for a large

company, whereas in the late 1800s a government position was considered to be superior employment in comparison to business.

The Taisho years brought no such good times, however, for the majority of women, workers in small enterprises, and farmers. Women factory workers enjoyed none of the lifetime benefits that male industrial workers in large companies received. Workers in small businesses and industries with five or fewer employees, who comprised 55 percent of the urban work force, were subject to low pay in good times and layoffs during bad times. Farmers and rural residents endured the most problems during the Taisho years. Although there were a few good years, from the end of World War I until the 1930s there was a long-term drop in crop prices.

Many rural people not only were ailing economically but felt bewildered and angry at the dizzying social change that seemed to be taking place in Japanese cities. Young people appeared to be giving up traditional Japanese habits and values in favor of Western lifestyles and ideas. The pendulum in the Taisho years seemed to have swung back again in favor of Western over Japanese culture.

By the 1920s, particularly in Tokyo, Western popular culture was extremely influential. Large numbers of people were reading adventure and love story magazines, listening to radio, flocking to Western and Japanese movies, attending baseball games, and playing tennis and golf. Young people listened and danced to jazz. Girls were shortening their hemlines and adopting Western-style hairdos while boys were wearing dark glasses. The Japanese, who had been incorporating foreign words into their language for centuries, began calling the young people who seemed to reject traditional Japanese culture in favor of Western customs *mobo* and *moga*, abbreviations for *modan boi* and *modan garu* ("modern boy" and "modern girl").¹⁵

Western influences were prevalent not only in popular culture but in politics as well. Even before the twentieth century, political parties developed in Japan and, although many of the Meiji rulers feared them, they grew in influence. By 1918 the premiership was being filled by the head of the leading political party instead of by the choices of Meiji-era political leaders, most of whom were by then dead. From 1918 until 1932, Japan for the most part followed the British parliamentary model, with heads of the major parties becoming premier and forming governments.

The leading Japanese political parties, however, were not particularly democratic and tended to stay in power by making deals with local officials and big business. Large numbers of the educated public in Japan became dissatisfied with political corruption and, particularly after World War I,

¹⁵ Accounts of economic and social changes of the Taisho years taken from Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 173-88.

The Detroit News Timely Topics



Suffrage Week in Tokio

Although Japanese women worked to get the vote during the 1920s, female suffrage was not enacted in Japan until after World War II. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

began to work for a more democratic government. In 1925 Japan appeared to be well on its way to this goal when the Diet gave all Japanese men, regardless of whether they owned property, the right to vote. Universal male suffrage, along with the dominance of party government, are the major reasons some historians call the 1920s in Japan the period of "Taisho Democracy."

Unfortunately, Japan was still far from a democratic country, and elements from the military and other conservative groups were both eager and powerful enough to stop the apparent movement toward a democratic and open society. The very year universal suffrage was made law, the Diet also passed the Peace Preservation Law, which made it a crime to argue that the present government should be abolished or that private property ownership should be challenged. The law was a largely successful attempt to silence urban radical communist and socialist groups, and because of it numbers of people were imprisoned and harassed.

In foreign affairs the Taisho years were marked by internal debate over what course of action to pursue in regard to imperial expansion and over Japan's relations with the Western powers. Japan solved the Korean problem by annexing the country in 1910 and fought World War I on the side of the Allied powers. As a result of the war, Japan acquired former German territories in the Pacific including the Marianas, Carolines, and Marshalls, as well as economic rights in Manchuria and parts of China. However, elements of the military, particularly young army officers, wanted more.

Many civilian politicians had quite the opposite opinion, feeling it was in Japan's best economic and political interest to get along with the Western powers, especially the United States. Government by civilian politicians in the 1920s resulted in the Japanese government agreeing to two naval arms limitations with Western countries, both of which were extremely unpopular with the military and conservative groups. In November 1930 Premier Hamaguchi was killed by a right-wing fanatic because of his leadership role in concluding the London Naval Treaty, which limited Japanese warship expansion.

The World Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s dealt a blow to the cause of liberal democracy in Japan and strengthened the military by increasing public discontent with the existing political order. Japanese exports dropped by 50 percent between 1929 and 1931 as the feeling grew that the country was in crisis. Small businessmen and farmers, the groups most affected by the depression, blamed the political parties, who seemed to be able to do nothing to stop the economic hard times.

Also many Japanese were bitter toward fellow citizens who wanted Western-style political institutions, and their reasons had little to do with economics. To these Japanese the Americans and Europeans were hypo-

critical when they talked about democracy and the equality of man but practiced racism. At the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference the Japanese tried to get the other major powers to include a clause on racial equality in the treaty, but they were defeated. Also, in 1924 the U.S. Congress passed an Exclusion Act that made it almost impossible for a Japanese to emigrate to the United States. Almost all Japanese, regardless of political viewpoint, considered the American law a terrible insult.

THE ROAD TO WAR

In 1926 the Taisho Emperor died and his son and successor, Hirohito, selected Showa or "Enlightened Peace" as the name for his reign. Events however, would make this choice extremely ironic.

By the late 1920s the Japanese army, under no constitutional restrictions and supported by large numbers of patriotic Japanese, was taking direct action in defiance of civilian government. The flash point was Manchuria, a land controlled by China but coveted by Japanese who wanted a powerful empire. Elements of the army and their supporters viewed Manchuria as a tremendous source for food and natural resources and as a buffer zone to protect the home islands against foreign powers.

In 1928 young Japanese officers of the Kwantung army stationed in Manchuria bombed a train carrying a Manchurian politician, and the army refused a request by the Japanese government to punish the officers involved in the plot. Three years later, by much more serious actions in Manchuria, the military managed to change the whole course of Japanese foreign policy from one of cooperation with the Western powers to one of imperial expansion in Asia.

In September 1931, Japanese army officers in Manchuria blew up part of a railway owned by Japan and, claiming local sabotage, overran all of Manchuria. The civilian Tokyo government was helpless in the face of army action. In January 1932 the army separated Manchuria from China and created the puppet state of Manchukuo. There was world outrage at this action and in early 1933 the League of Nations issued a report condemning Japanese aggression. Japan responded by withdrawing from the League, thereby further heightening world tensions.

Japanese public reaction to the army's bold moves was largely favorable, as the popular belief continued to grow that Japan had a divine mission both to "liberate" Asia from any Western influences and to build a strong empire. By the 1930s Japanese sentiment toward foreigners had again shifted as more and more Western countries and Western influences were viewed to be the major sources of Japan's problems. Certain foreign books began to be banned in many Japanese universities, and public



The 63-year reign of the late Emperor Hirohito, who is pictured here at about the time he ascended to the throne, included military disaster and economic triumph for Japan. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

school ethics courses taught that Western influences were the causes of Japan's social problems.

The Manchurian takeover and further incidents involving Japanese army units in China strengthened the will of the Chinese government to resist Japanese expansion. Fighting began on the night of July 7, 1937, with a minor skirmish between Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge, and in the months that followed the fighting blossomed into an undeclared but full-scale war between China and Japan. Most historians consider the Japanese-Chinese war as the actual beginning of World War II.

At first the Japanese won victory after victory and in December 1937 captured the Chinese capital of Nanking. In what was to become one of the worst atrocities of the twentieth century, victorious Japanese troops in Nanking murdered, robbed, and raped civilians in the city. Soon the Japanese army began to encounter stiff Chinese resistance, and although Japan continued to win victories it could not score the knockout blow to end the war. Japan had become involved in a quagmire in China.

The United States by this time was increasingly using economic weapons in an attempt to get Japan out of China. In summer 1938 the United States placed an embargo on shipments of war material to Japan. In the fall of 1940, after Japan moved into Northern Indochina in an attempt to gain vital rubber and oil supplies for the military, the United States ended all scrap iron and steel exports to Japan. Finally, in the summer of 1941 the American government, in response to further Japanese advances into Indochina, froze all Japanese assets in the United States. At the same time the American, British, and Dutch East Indies governments ended oil exports to Japan. Although Japan attempted negotiations with the United States, the oil embargo, which cut off 90 percent of Japan's oil supply, pushed Japan toward a decision to fight the United States.

In late fall 1941, high officials of the Japanese government, in a last attempt to avoid war, proposed to Washington that Japan would withdraw from Indochina if the United States ended the oil embargo and assisted Japan in peace negotiations with China. The American government responded that nothing less than Japanese withdrawal from China, Manchuria, and Indochina would be acceptable. To the Japanese the American response proved that the United States was out to crush Japan and maintain Western domination over all Asia.¹⁶

¹⁶ Descriptions of foreign affairs and the rise of Japanese militarism taken from Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 189-223; Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 137-50; and Britt, *Japan: The Changing Tradition*, pp. 193-95.

WORLD WAR II AND THE OCCUPATION

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft-carrier-based planes carried out a successful surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific fleet moored in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack, which sunk or severely damaged nineteen naval vessels and killed over 2,000 U.S. sailors and soldiers, resulted in an American declaration of war against Japan on December 8.¹⁷ Many Japanese realized that the decision to attack the American fleet was an extremely bold gamble, since Japan could not match the productive resources of the United States. Japanese strategy was therefore predicated on a very quick war. Japan's leaders hoped to quickly establish, and hold against American counterattack, a defense perimeter in Asia from the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific to Malaya and Indochina. The Japanese hoped their victories in the Pacific and the conquest of Europe by Japan's ally, Nazi Germany, would pressure the Americans to resort to negotiations to end the war. The ensuing peace settlement would leave Japan dominant in East Asia.

One reason Japanese people accepted this foolhardy strategy was a popular belief that Japan could be a moral alternative for all of Asia to the materialistic West. The Japanese government clarified these sentiments early in the war by the formulation of a document called *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*. In it, victory over the United States was only the first objective in attaining the long-range goal of building, under Japanese leadership, a strong and unified Asia and Pacific community.

At first, Japanese dreams seemed to be coming true. By spring 1942 Japan had conquered Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines. The Japanese also established island bases throughout the Southwest and Central Pacific in such places as Guam, Wake Island, and the Solomons. Japan grossly underestimated American determination and economic might, however, and by May 1942 the tides of war were already beginning to turn. In June 1942 a Japanese attempt to finish the American Pacific fleet for good backfired when Japan lost four valuable aircraft carriers at the battle of Midway. During the rest of the year and throughout 1943 the Americans won islands back from the Japanese.

By summer 1944 U.S. forces captured the island of Saipan, allowing American planes to conduct regular bombing raids on the Japanese home islands. In October 1944 American forces under General Douglas MacArthur began an effort to reconquer the Philippines by landing at Leyte Gulf. Japan's situation had become desperate.

Still, the Japanese military fought on and civilians persevered even as

¹⁷ William Harris and Judith Levey, eds., *The New Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) p. 2089.



In early 1942 the Japanese army won victory after victory and seemed almost invincible. The situation would begin to change, however, before the end of the year. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



The War in Asia, 1941–1945. The Japanese fought tenaciously in the Pacific islands but American might was too great for the imperial forces. Remember the United States was also fighting the Germans and Italians in Europe. Which theatre of operations was considered a higher priority by the U.S. government?

American bombing raids on the home islands intensified. In one terrible night alone in March 1945, the fire bombing of Tokyo left 78,000 people dead and 43,480 wounded. By 1945 young Japanese Kamikaze or "divine wind" pilots were engaging in suicide missions against the United States while civilians were training with sharpened spears to resist to the death the expected American invasion of Japan.

At the July 1945 Potsdam Conference, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, which was then not yet at war with Japan, reaffirmed their previous demand of unconditional surrender. Japan was threatened with complete destruction if the offer was refused.¹⁸ Just a few days later, on August 6, 1945, the Americans dropped the first atomic bomb, in wartime upon the Japanese city of Hiroshima. By Japanese estimates 87,150 people died at Hiroshima, and three days later a second American bomb killed almost as many people in Nagasaki. By then the Soviet Union had also declared war on Japan and sent troops into Manchuria. On August 14, 1945, Emperor Hirohito persuaded his ministers to accept unconditional surrender, ending World War II. Japan, with over 2,300,000 soldiers dead, 800,000 civilians killed or wounded, and one-third of the population homeless, was a conquered country for the first time in history.¹⁹

The years following World War II would bring more change to Japan than at any time since the beginning of the Meiji Period. Although theoretically an eleven-nation Far East Commission was responsible for the occupation, the United States under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur was primarily responsible for what occurred.

MacArthur, Supreme Commander of Allied Pacific forces, was a brilliant, dynamic, charismatic, and eccentric man. The general almost immediately won the respect and admiration of the Japanese people. MacArthur's courage, dedication to duty—he worked seven days a week—and regal bearing reminded many Japanese of the best characteristics of the samurai. MacArthur was so popular that crowds gathered just to see him come and go from his Tokyo headquarters. Every month Japanese sent him over 1,000 letters, and there were even rumors that the general was descended from the Japanese imperial family!²⁰ Partially because of the influence of MacArthur, and because of a widespread feeling among the Japanese that the militarist course of action had been a disastrous one, the Japanese people were extremely cooperative toward the Americans.

¹⁸ Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, pp. 224–37.

¹⁹ Casualty figures from Duus, *Rise of Modern Japan*, p. 152, and Pyle, *Making of Modern Japan*, p. 238.

²⁰ William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880–1964* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978), p. 709.

The result was that the American occupation of Japan ranks as one of the most peaceful and orderly occupations of one country by another in world history.

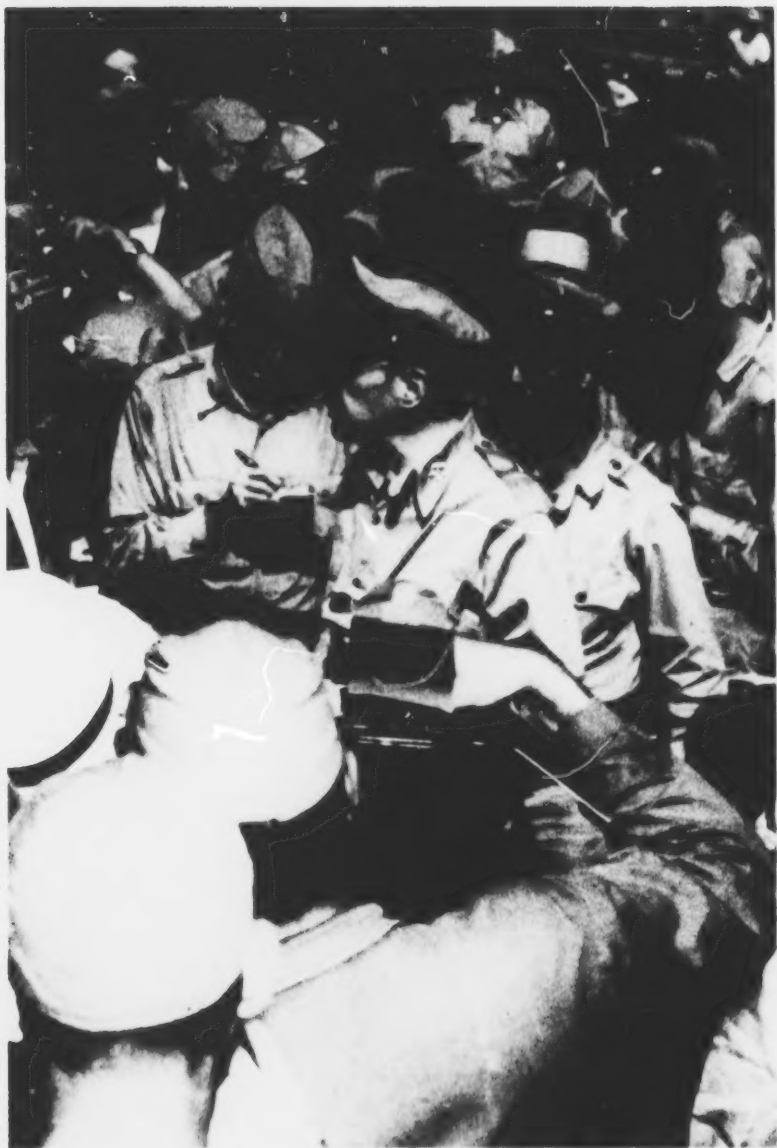
Even though Douglas MacArthur was a life-long conservative Republican, his goals for Japan were extremely liberal. MacArthur and his staff sought nothing less than a democratic and peaceful Japan and initiated sweeping reforms to achieve this goal. The wartime leadership was quickly purged from government. Despite the fact that many Americans wanted the imperial line abolished, MacArthur after much thought decided to allow the Japanese to retain their national symbol.

The Japanese Diet's 1946 approval of a new constitution, the draft of which was written by Americans in six days, was a major event of the occupation. The new constitution proved to be a solid framework for democracy. The emperor was retained but only as a symbol of state. A British-style parliamentary system and an independent judiciary were established. Universal suffrage for both sexes was guaranteed for the first time in history. The Japanese Constitution was actually more liberal than the American one, guaranteeing both equal rights for the sexes and the right of labor unions to exist. Article Nine abolished the Japanese armed forces and renounced "forever" war as a means of solving international disputes.

The occupation, in addition to bringing about the massive restructuring of the Japanese political system, produced major economic reforms. The *Zaibatsu* were broken up and the Americans made good their guarantee of labor unions by actively promoting them. Land reform was the most sweeping economic change of all in the early occupation years. In October 1946 a revolutionary land law went into effect, which, with a few exceptions, limited individually owned farms to no more than seven and one-half acres. This law resulted in the sale at very cheap prices of over 5 million acres of farm land. Before reform, at least 70 percent of Japanese farmers were tenants and relatively few individuals owned large amounts of land. By the end of the 1950s only 3 percent of Japan's farmers were tenants.²¹

The Americans were not content with economic and political reform alone but wanted to change Japanese thinking so as to create the appropriate climate for democracy. In 1947 occupation authorities forced the Japanese to change their educational system radically. Japan's schools were modeled after the American six-year elementary school, three-year junior high, and three-year senior high school system. The new curriculum included social studies courses designed to foster democratic thinking. American reformers even attempted to decentralize the Japanese public

²¹ James Huffman, "Land Reform," Article 21 in Britt, *Japan: The Changing Tradition*.



General Douglas MacArthur (center, in profile in this photograph) was brilliant as a U.S. commander in the war against Japan and just as successful in assisting the country to rebuild after World War II. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

school system by including locally elected school boards in the education laws.

By the late 1940s, however, the United States was becoming less idealistic about changing Japan. Originally, occupation authorities gave much higher priority to Japanese democratization than to rebuilding Japan's economy. Once the Cold War began, American policymakers began to worry that an economically weakened Japan could very well fall to the communists. By 1948 the Americans ceased to encourage labor unions and backed off in their attempts to break up large business concerns.

The new American thinking was shared by a number of Japanese political leaders, including Yoshida Shigeru, who served as prime minister during most of the occupation years. This shift in American policy, the good fortune of the Japanese to be convenient suppliers of American forces during the 1950-1953 Korean War, and the hard work of the Japanese people paid off. By the early 1950s the Japanese economy was well on its way to recovery.

The American occupation officially ended in September 1952 after a peace treaty was signed in San Francisco the previous year. Although the Japanese later abolished some American reforms, such as the attempt to decentralize public schools, Japan today, as a democratic and free society, continues to benefit from the sweeping, outside-initiated changes of the occupation years.²²

UNPARALLELED PROSPERITY: CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

Since the occupation, the so-called "economic miracle" has been, by far, the most important event in Japanese history. From 1954 until the 1970s Japan led all nations in annual economic growth rates. Although the economy has slowed down since that time, it continues to grow at one of the most impressive rates in the world. Today Japan's products have a worldwide reputation for quality for a number of reasons, including the tremendous efforts of ordinary people.

In concrete terms Japanese people are also better off materially than in any time in the nation's history. Except in housing, the lifestyle of the typical Japanese is an affluent one by the standards of any country. Japanese enjoy ample food, televisions, automobiles, and a wide range of consumer goods.

²² Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), pp. 221-43.

Japan's economic miracle, however, has not been without problems. Until the 1970s the government and private business concentrated so much on first rebuilding the nation, and later fueling the economic miracle, that social concerns such as adequate housing, protection against pollution, and attention to health and old-age related issues were ignored. Also by the 1960s and 1970s many Japanese, particularly male workers and managers of large companies, were questioning the worth of sacrificing much of their personal lives to the workplace. During the 1980s, as Japan developed an international trade surplus, due in part to its economic success, other nations became increasingly resentful.

In politics, relations with the United States has been one of the most important issues in postwar Japan. All in all, Japan and the United States are staunch allies, but there have been occasional strains in relations. In Japan since the occupation, controversy has occurred periodically over the continued presence of American bases. Some Japanese are troubled by the larger question of whether their country can afford to be too intimately tied to the United States and thereby be in a seemingly permanent adversarial stance toward the Soviet Union. Also the Japanese have sometimes felt that although they have been a faithful ally of the United States, they are often treated by American policymakers as a relatively unimportant country.

Despite these problems, postwar Japan rose from defeat to develop a strong economy, a stable democracy, and a society that is relatively trouble free when compared with that of most nations. Through a closer examination of modern Japanese institutions in the chapters to follow, you should come to understand better contemporary Japan's many triumphs and her few, but quite serious, problems.

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Meiji Period
- Imperialism
- Taisho Period
- Zaibatsu
- Pearl Harbor
- Hiroshima
- American Occupation
- Article Nine of the 1946 Constitution

Review Questions

1. In your own words in a short paragraph describe several major features of the economic modernization of Meiji Japan.
2. In two to three sentences describe why the Japanese government adopted imperialist policies in the late 1800s.
3. In a paragraph identify the major events that led to the Japanese decision to bomb Pearl Harbor.
4. In your own words in a short paragraph describe some major ways the American occupation changed Japan.

Essay Question

1. Although Japan was, in general, both wrong and unwise to engage in the imperialist policies that began in the late 1800s and eventually led to defeat in World War II, there is a case that can be made for Japanese policy. Read the sections in the chapter that deal with foreign policy again and write an essay defending the Japanese decision to engage in imperialism.

In-Depth Learning

1. In 1854 American demands placed the Japanese government in a very difficult position. For years Japan had been largely cut off from the rest of the world and suddenly foreigners were insisting upon establishing relations. Have the class divide into four groups. Two groups are to pretend that they are officials in the Tokugawa government who oppose establishing relations with the United States, while the other two groups represent factions within the government who favor meeting American demands. After discussion, each group should formulate a set of arguments for their position and have a spokesperson present it to the rest of the class.
2. Although today the United States and Japan are friends, only a little over 40 years ago they fought a very bitter war in the Pacific. In the following activities, you use primary sources to learn more about the history of that war.
 - Conduct an oral history project in which you interview veterans in your community who fought in the Pacific and others who were old enough to remember World War II. Ask them about their feelings about the Japanese then and what, if any, changes in feelings have occurred since the end of World War II.
 - Invite to your class speakers who fought the Japanese and have them discuss their experiences during the war and their feelings about Japan then and now.
 - Go to your public library and identify and make copies of articles from old *Life* magazines or newspapers that deal with the war against the Japanese or that are illustrative of American feelings toward the Japanese during the war years.

3. The decision by President Truman to use the atomic bomb against Japan is one of the most controversial decisions in recent American history. Organize a classroom debate that focuses on the following question: Should the United States have used the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan?

FURTHER READING

If you are interested in Japan since 1868, Kenneth Pyle's *The Making of Modern Japan* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1978), or Peter Duus's *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), are both concise but interesting accounts of modern Japanese history. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are major events in world, as well as Japanese history. One of the best books about this subject is John Hershey's *Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1985 ed.). American and Japanese perspectives of each other in the years before and during World War II are fascinating topics that have recently been addressed in the award-winning book, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, by John Dower (New York: Random House, 1986).

C H A P T E R



F I V E

**THE
JAPANESE
ECONOMY**

INTRODUCTION: THE ECONOMY AND ONE MAN

Tanaka Sanosuke was born into a peasant family on a tiny farm near Tokyo in 1915. The Tanakas lived an extremely hard life. Both parents and the children over 11 years of age worked long hours in the rice paddies but were forced to give up four-fifths of their annual crops to the landowner. The family lived in a tiny one-room thatch-roofed hut and usually had only rice mixed with millet to eat. When times were good, and they rarely were, the family could replace the hard millet with vegetables. On rare occasions the Tanakas ate fish but they could never afford meat.

The village of 500 where the Tanakas lived was almost entirely cut off from the outside world. The villagers, as was true with most Japanese in the early and mid-twentieth century, owned no radios to keep up with the news or cars to escape to other parts of Japan. In fact, young Tanaka was eight years old before he saw his first gas-driven vehicle, a bus.

Education was the only aspect of Sanosuke's life that seemed to offer hope for the future. Sanosuke, who worked hard and became the best student in the tiny village school, dreamed of eventually becoming a teacher. In the 1920s compulsory education in Japan ended with the sixth grade, and Sanosuke's three older brothers quit school then because they were needed for farm work. For a time it seemed that Sanosuke would have a different future. A local teacher persuaded Sanosuke's father to allow young Tanaka to remain in school through the eighth grade. However, things for Sanosuke took a turn for the worse as his father, who was desperate for money, indentured young Tanaka to a family in a neighboring village.

Sanosuke was forced to quit school and for five years he delivered coal for a small business in exchange for the barest room and board and payments to the Tanaka family. Because Sanosuke had been a fine student, he also tutored the children of the family to whom he had been indentured. Unfortunately, this tutorial work was all that remained of a young boy's dream of becoming an educator.

Young Tanaka's difficult childhood and lack of early career options were typical of the majority of Japanese before World War II. However, Japan's twentieth-century economic modernization, which began in the Tokugawa and Meiji years, profoundly changed the lives of millions of adult Japanese, including Tanaka Sanosuke.

After completing his servitude and moving to Yokohama, Sanosuke in 1937 was hired as an assembly worker by Nissan, a new company that was part of a very small Japanese automotive industry. Although Sanosuke's starting pay was modest, he earned almost as much in a month with Nissan than he had made in a whole year working in a store a few months

earlier. Upon receiving his first paycheck, he purchased something no one in his family had ever dreamed of owning before: a new suit. Furthermore, by taking a position with Nissan, Sanosuke became a success in the eyes of the people of his native village. He had left the dire poverty of the farm and was engaged in the production of important products, trucks, which were symbols of Japan's emerging strength.

At the end of World War II, eleven years later, Sanosuke's life had taken a severe turn for the worse. In 1946 Tanaka returned to Japan and Nissan after military service abroad to find his country in ruins. Sanosuke was married and the father of two children by then, and the pay at Nissan was so low that the family could not even buy enough food to live. On Saturday afternoon after the plant closed, Tanaka was reduced to going to the countryside to forage for food. On Sunday, Tanaka's only full day off each week, he hung around American occupation troops hoping to get work as a day laborer or at least scrounge scraps of food the rich Americans threw away.

Fortunately, Sanosuke and most other Japanese did not remain in this destitute situation very long. By 1954 Nissan profits and salaries had risen enough that Tanaka was able to purchase a small, three-room house. It was a proud day for all five members of the Tanaka family when they could move out of their one-room house into these larger quarters. By the mid-1950s Nissan and many other Japanese companies were rebounding from the effects of World War II and actually exceeding prewar production levels.

Sanosuke's personal standard of living continued to improve as the years passed. In 1957 Tanaka, who had grown up in a village in which everyone was too poor even to own a radio, bought a television set. In 1963 Sanosuke became a real member of the Japanese middle class with a purchase of the ultimate status symbol: his first car!

The great gains in wealth that Sanosuke and many other Japanese enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s did not come easily. The nation paid an incredible price in human effort, first to rebuild Japan and then to take the economy to undreamed heights. In Sanosuke's company, Nissan, for example, each year it seemed the workers put in more and more effort to meet increasing consumer demand.

For a while car and truck production increases from one year to the next staggered the imagination. In 1957 Sanosuke and his co-workers celebrated when the company reached the stage where 5,000 cars and trucks a month were produced. Almost no Nissan workers even dreamed at that time that only three years later the monthly production figures would double to 10,000. Nissan was only one of many companies where people worked incredibly long hours and, by the early 1960s, were some-

what awestruck at the fruit of their labor. Japan had arrived as an economic power.¹

By 1964 people from all over the world were also beginning to realize the magnitude of the Japanese economic success story. That year thousands of foreign visitors to the Tokyo Olympics did much more than merely watch the athletic events. They experienced in concrete terms a nation that was, in contrast to the hard times of less than twenty years before, affluent and becoming more affluent with each passing day.

Although the whirlwind growth of the 1950s and 1960s has ended, Japan today is, along with the United States and the Soviet Union, one of the three most important economies in the world. This chapter will help you understand the answers to a few fundamental questions about the Japanese economy. How, in such a short time, has Japan attained such great wealth? What is work like for the human beings who fuel one of the most efficient economic machines on the planet? What are the current economic problems and future prospects for Japan?

THE ROOTS OF SUCCESS: THE PRE-WORLD WAR II ECONOMY

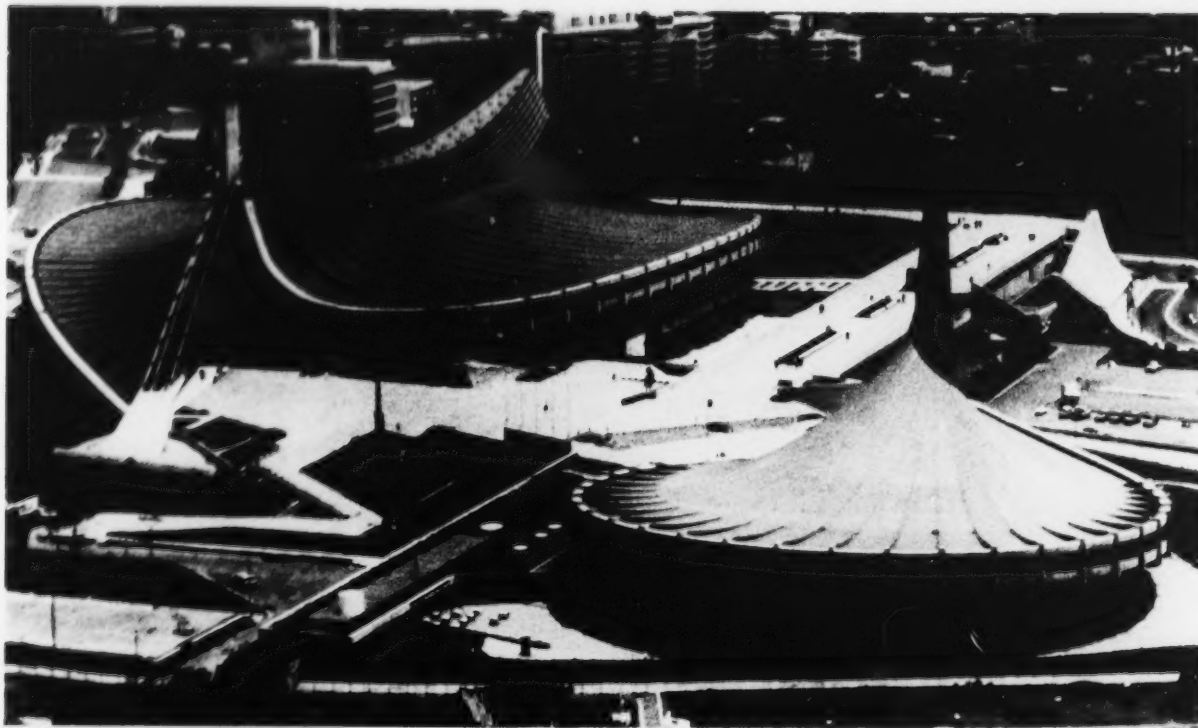
National economic growth at any point in time is, in part, rooted in earlier historical periods. Japan ranked among world leaders in annual economic growth rates in the 80 years before 1941.² This expansion, which helped to set the stage for the modern Japanese "economic miracle," was caused by a variety of factors, including sound economic decisions by business and government, Japan's political stability, and the nature of Japanese society.

While Tokugawa Japan was technologically backward compared with the West, when Perry and his fleet arrived Japan was certainly no primitive nation. In the height of the Tokugawa era various kinds of businesses were flourishing and the use of money was widespread. By the 1850s larger percentages of Japanese were literate than was the case in most of the world's countries. The Japan that Perry visited contained an economic base for future commercial and industrial expansion, and a segment of the population well educated enough to make good use of new Western technology.

Furthermore, an economic condition was present in Tokugawa Japan

¹ The story of Tanaka Sanosuke is from David Halberstam, *The Reckoning* (New York: Avon Books, 1986), pp. 170-78, 414-23.

² Isamu Miyazaki, "Japan's Economic Dynamism," in Keiko Shimoyama, ed., *Essays on Japan from Japan* (Tokyo: Maruzen Co., Ltd., 1987), p. 124.



To the Japanese the 1964 Olympics were much more than just games. They were a symbol that the economy had recovered from World War II. People from all over the world were impressed with the new Olympic facilities built in the Yoyogi district of Tokyo, which are still used today. Courtesy of the Australian Overseas Information Bureau and the Library of Congress.



that is absolutely imperative in any society if widespread economic modernization is to take place. Increasing numbers of farmers not only were engaged in subsistence agriculture but were producing crop surpluses as well. As a result, crop reserves could be sold for cash and thus capital for business investment accrued. Because of this surplus cash due to profits from commercial agriculture, small-business growth rate was high in Tokugawa Japan.

Noneconomic aspects of Tokugawa Japanese society also helped to make prospects for rapid economic growth quite bright. Because of a common language and history, the Japanese possessed a relatively high degree of national unity. Also the Tokugawa government managed to keep the peace within Japan for over 250 years, an achievement that almost always contributes to stable economic growth.

Although by the latter Tokugawa years these favorable conditions for economic modernization existed, Japan did not really begin the process until after the Meiji Restoration. In our examination of modern Japanese history we learned of the Meiji government tax reforms and comprehensive efforts to enhance the economy, including educational improvements, export promotion, importation of foreign technology, the development of factories, and encouragement of private business. Meiji Japan's successes in exporting and industrialization were particularly important since these actions helped to cause even greater economic success in the early twentieth century.

The Japanese were extremely fortunate in the early Meiji years in that raw silk, a large peasant industry, enjoyed high worldwide demand. This demand, partially due to a disastrous European silk blight, subsequently enabled Japan to export massive amounts of silk and thereby raise the money to import equipment and raw materials for industrialization.

The government, in order to aid industry, quickly established a national currency and banking system, which in turn greatly facilitated the flow of savings to private industry. Next, Meiji leaders were highly successful in establishing a national communications and transportation infrastructure. Along with these goals, the government began large-scale economic enterprises such as coal mining and shipbuilding, which were later sold to private business.

As the twentieth century began, although the Japanese government continued its policies of economic assistance, private industry became increasingly important. World War I was a tremendous boom for the Japanese economy. Exports quadrupled and important heavy industries such as shipbuilding, and iron and steel, although still minor compared with textiles and agriculture, became substantial parts of the economy.

The 1920s and 1930s, despite major economic difficulties, brought continued long-term growth in Japanese manufacturing. In 1935 industrial

production became, for the first time, more financially valuable to the total economy than agriculture. Although textiles remained Japan's leading industry, accounting for approximately half of all exports in 1920 and 1930, heavy industry grew rapidly. By 1937, thanks to the expansion of ship-building, Japan possessed the world's third largest merchant marine fleet. In the same year, largely because of the military build-up, total heavy industrial production for the first time surpassed light industry in value.

There were great advancements also in the educational levels of the general populace in the early twentieth century as increasing numbers of Japanese moved from agricultural to industrial employment. Also, by the 1930s some large industries granted workers permanent employment, good pay, and health and welfare benefits.

As was true in Meiji times, representatives of Japanese government and business continued to cooperate well in the twentieth century. As the Japanese empire expanded into Manchuria in the 1930s, members of the government bureaucracy and certain private companies gained experience in joint economic planning and even in successful foreign investment.

Although Japan incurred a tremendous human and economic cost because of World War II, it is important to understand that this catastrophe could not erase the human know-how in industrial production, management-labor relations, and government-business cooperation that had been growing in Japan for decades. The cumulative knowledge of the Japanese people in these areas would prove to be of vital importance as Japan struggled to rebound from the worst disaster in the nation's history.³

THE MAKING OF THE ECONOMIC MIRACLE

Despite the experience and knowledge of its people, Japan was a devastated nation at the end of World War II. Millions of Japanese, even those such as Tanaka Sanosuke who held jobs, were without the basic necessities of life. Approximately one-fourth of all Japanese homes had been destroyed in the war, as well as a high proportion of factories and shops. Japan was also stripped of its entire empire, which had been a vital source of low-cost raw materials, and of its investments in China and Manchuria.

For several years after World War II the Japanese survived only because of substantial American aid. In addition to general poverty, Japan

³ This summation of Japanese economic history is based on portions of G. C. Allen, *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); W. J. Macpherson, *The Economic Development of Modern Japan* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1987); and Takafusa Nakamura, *Economic Development of Modern Japan* (Singapore: Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1985).



The economic situation in Japan was so critical in the years immediately following World War II that many Japanese depended upon U.S. military personnel for such basic necessities as food. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

in the early occupation years was plagued by rising prices and labor unrest. For a time after the war industrial production was so sluggish that many former factory workers returned to the countryside looking for food and work. Housing shortages were so critical in Japanese cities shortly after the war that often several families were squeezed into one dwelling.

The late 1940s brought the first postwar economic upturn when the Americans, for fear that a weakened Japan might fall to the communists, forced the Japanese to stabilize prices and assisted in the rebuilding of major companies. Shortly afterward, as was recounted in an earlier chapter, the United States became involved in the Korean War, which proved to be extremely fortunate for Japan. The 1950–1953 conflict brought massive American orders for Japanese goods. By 1951 Japanese industrial production reached its highest level since 1944.⁴

Shortly after the end of the Korean War the economic take-off began in earnest. From the early 1950s until the early 1970s Japan experienced what is probably the highest sustained rate of economic growth in world history. Annual real Gross National Product (GNP) growth, or the money value of the total output of Japan's goods and services adjusted for inflation, averaged 10 percent during these years. By 1957 Japan's recovery from World War II was complete, as GNP growth that year was 50 percent higher than prewar levels.⁵

It seemed as if the whole nation was single-mindedly dedicated to one objective: the pursuit of economic growth. Perhaps Honda Soichiro, Honda Motor Company president, best expressed the spirit of the times when he made the following statements at the time he established his company: "If my company becomes bankrupt because of the rate at which I expand my plant, the plant itself will remain to be used for the development of Japanese industry. So I will take the risk."⁶

The risks taken by Honda and many others like him were well worthwhile. Although the 1950s were prosperous, they only laid the foundation for the even more spectacular growth of the 1960s. By the end of the 1960s Japan's economy had grown to be the third largest in the world and Japanese industry was producing approximately ten times as many goods as on the eve of World War II. Even though in the 1970s and afterward the Arab oil embargo, increased world competition, and the attainment of economic maturity caused Japan's annual growth rates to average less than half the amounts of the two previous decades, Japan continues to lead all major nations in economic growth.

The most impressive aspect of Japan's postwar economic develop-

⁴ Allen, *A Short Economic History*, p. 190.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 190–95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

ment has been the tremendous amount of diversification. The Japanese by the mid-1950s were world leaders in the production of high-quality scientific instruments, cameras, and sewing machines. In the latter 1950s electronics and shipbuilding production grew rapidly. By 1960 Japan was the world's largest shipbuilder and one of the largest manufacturers of radio equipment. In the 1960s the Japanese ranked among world leaders in production of televisions, petrochemicals, and steel.⁷

Automobiles became Japan's chief growth industry of the 1970s. In 1960 Tanaka Sanosuke and his co-workers produced fewer cars than workers in several European countries. However, by 1970 Japan was the world's second largest manufacturer of cars, and today it is the world's number one producer of passenger cars. Japanese companies at present and probably well into the twenty-first century will be among world leaders in robot, semiconductor, microprocessor, computer, and optic fiber production. In addition to manufacturing, Japan has assumed world importance in service industries such as banking, commercial aviation, and insurance.⁸

You can understand what this economic growth has meant in human terms if you will think how Tanaka Sanosuke's life changed for the better in the postwar decades and if you realize that his incredible story is true for millions of Japanese. The typical Japanese citizen's annual consumption of goods and services is now over five times what it was before World War II. The average Japanese factory worker now makes more money in a year than his or her American counterpart. At present the Japanese are one of the world's most affluent people. How the Japanese have attained this enviable position is a question that certainly deserves further explanation.⁹

THE REASONS FOR JAPAN'S ECONOMIC SUCCESS

A number of factors, including good luck, have contributed to Japan's post-World War II ascendancy. In general the Japanese were quite fortunate to have been occupied by the United States. The United States not only assisted the Japanese economically after 1948 but provided the economy with a needed boost at a critical time through massive purchases for the Korean War. The famous Article Nine of the American-imposed con-

⁷ Ibid., pp. 190-95.

⁸ James C. Abegglen and George Stalk, *Kaisha, The Japanese Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), p. 4.

⁹ Edward L. Lincoln, *Japan: Facing Economic Maturity* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1988), p. 267.



In the "economic miracle" years of the 1950s and 1960s, increased production in heavy industries such as steel, shipbuilding, and automobiles was a major priority of Japanese business and government. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

stitution forbidding the establishment of armed forces has resulted in long-term, if originally unintended, economic benefits. Because of this constitution, Japan spends a very low percentage of national wealth on defense compared with other nations. Therefore, these resources are free to be utilized in ways that are beneficial to the civilian economy.

Also, for most of the years since World War II the world has enjoyed one of the most liberal climates in history for international trade. This has been extremely beneficial for many Japanese companies, which, after enjoying success at home, were able to realize even greater profits by selling goods to the rest of the world.

Good fortune notwithstanding, the Japanese themselves are primarily responsible for their successes. The fierce competitiveness of Japanese companies, ample availability of money for economic investment, efficient technology utilization, a superb educational system, a high level of both government-business and labor-management cooperation, and hard work are important positive characteristics of Japan's economy and society that help to explain the "miracle." We will look at each of these factors in detail.

Today in order for any country to have a strong economy, it is vital that many of its companies be highly competitive, both domestically and internationally. Major Japanese companies making products as diverse as automobiles, cameras, earth-moving equipment, and semiconductors manage year after year to be among the world's most competitive businesses.

Large Japanese companies maintain their high standards through behaving astutely and aggressively vis-à-vis their competition. One example of Japanese private business astuteness is the great effort most workers make to learn about their particular business. In Japanese companies it is common practice for assembly line workers as well as management to read trade newspapers regularly so as to be better informed about the actions of competing companies.¹⁰

The aggressiveness of Japanese private companies most often takes the form of a never-ending quest to dominate a market by attaining a higher percentage of sales than competing firms. The typical Japanese firm, whether marketing sewing machines at home or stereos in the United States, is initially most concerned with expanding its share of sales in a particular market at the expense of competitors.¹¹

The willingness to undersell competitors in an attempt to gain market share, even if it means losing money, is a key competitive strategy for

¹⁰ Robert Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), pp. 200-210.

¹¹ Abegglen and Stalk, *Kaisha*, pp. 42-58.

industry in Japan and throughout the world. In Japan Honda successfully captured much of the motorcycle market—which another Japanese company, Yamaha, previously dominated—through consistent underpricing of the competition. Mr. Tanaka's company, Nissan, which is now quite successful in the United States, is said to have lost money in the American market for ten years before it started to generate profits.¹²

Often Japanese firms such as Nissan, after greatly expanding sales in a product market, achieve what economists call *economies of scale*. Because Nissan sells an enormous number of cars, its production costs per car are relatively low. Because of these economies of scale, the company can charge consumers less per car than other automobile producers burdened with high production costs. Thus when a business realizes economies of scale, as do many Japanese firms, it usually both outsells competing companies and enjoys substantial profits.

Successful private companies constantly engage in expansion, product innovation, and acquisition of new technology, all of which require a large amount of money or investment capital. A major reason the Japanese economy is so successful is that it generates a tremendous amount of investment capital for business. In an economy, aggregate personal savings, or the total amount of money saved by citizens over a given period of time, is an important source of business investment funds. Banks and other financial institutions loan the savings of millions of individuals as investment capital to businesses.

The Japanese people for a number of years have led the world in personal savings rates. Currently, the average Japanese family saves over three times as much money each year as an American family.¹³ Because of the frugality of the Japanese people and other factors, such as the low average dividends Japanese companies pay to stockholders, usually there is more investment capital available to Japanese business than is true with American or Western European businesses. Access to investment capital enables such companies as Nissan, Sony, and Toyota to modernize factories and introduce innovative products on a regular basis.

A company's capacity to build new plants, improve existing facilities, or introduce innovative products, however, is dependent upon more than the availability of investment capital. Technology, or the ability of a society to transfer basic scientific knowledge to business and industry, is a vital determinant of economic success. The Japanese are extremely adept

¹² Lester C. Thurow, ed., *The Management Challenge: Japanese Views* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 137.

¹³ Douglas Ostrom, "Japan's Savings Rate Holds Steady," *JEI Report*, No. 28B (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, July 22, 1988), p. 3.

at improving upon already existing technology. Recent Japanese advances in robotics are only one of many examples.

Today a visitor to almost any Japanese automobile plant will see a number of robots performing welding, painting, and other assembly line functions. Robots are now quite common throughout Japan, as the Japanese rank first in the world in the utilization, production, and export of industrial robots. By contrast, only a few years ago Japan was importing the few robots used by industry and the United States was the world's leading robot producer. Japan surpassed the United States in robotics and in the production of other sophisticated products, including color television picture tubes and transistor radios, by first gathering and analyzing massive amounts of information on existing product technology and then significantly improving that technology. On the factory floor careful Japanese attention to production engineering ensures that technology will be used efficiently to produce quality goods.

As you already learned, for well over a thousand years the Japanese have collected and used foreign technology. Early in the twentieth century the Japanese established international trading companies with branch offices in foreign countries. Today these branch offices keep abreast of the latest foreign technology and transmit the information to Japanese companies. There is even a special government agency, the Agency of Industrial Science and Technology, that monitors scientific and technical developments abroad and identifies new technology that will be important to Japanese industries.¹⁴

Japanese government and private industry also gathers information on foreign technology by sending thousands of people each year to study in foreign countries, particularly the United States. In a recent year 40,000 Japanese came to American graduate schools such as the University of Michigan, MIT, and Stanford University for advanced training in engineering and scientifically related fields. In contrast American companies annually send, on average, one-eighth as many employees to Japan for study.¹⁵

The Japanese who go to other countries to study technology can make excellent use of what they learn because many are trained engineers. Japan, with half the population of the United States each year, produces about the same number of university-trained engineers. In Japan a large number of engineers rise to business management positions, a situation

¹⁴ Martin C. Schnitzer, *Comparative Economic Systems*, 4th ed. (Cincinnati: South-Western, 1987), p. 202.

¹⁵ Statistics taken from lecture by Professor Leonard Lynn of Carnegie-Mellon University on October 10, 1986, at Tennessee Technological University.

that creates a climate within the Japanese factory that is very conducive to recognition and utilization of new technology.

Not only the trained engineers, but also ordinary Japanese assembly line workers are quite competent in the basic skills needed to use technology. Japanese mathematics education in elementary and secondary schools is so advanced compared with that of other nations that high school graduates who become assembly line workers use statistical analysis in their work.

Ordinary workers are also quite literate compared with assembly line workers in many nations. In the 1970s a group of high school-educated Japanese steel company assembly line foremen toured foreign steel companies and wrote a book on the technology of steel production.¹⁶

The constant search for new technological information, a workforce with an excellent background in mathematics and science, and other factors such as the willingness of companies to invest large amounts in purchases of foreign technology have resulted in state-of-the-art products, and healthy profits for Japanese business.

Japanese government, as illustrated by the activities of the Agency of Industrial Science and Technology, is an active partner in this process. In fact, information gathering is only one of several roles that the national government fulfills in an attempt to strengthen Japan's economy. Since the Meiji years when government built factories and financed the acquisition of foreign technology, business-government partnerships have been a crucial part of Japan's economic achievements.

Within the Japanese government the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) is primarily responsible for promoting, regulating, and guiding Japan's industries. MITI, an extremely powerful government agency, employs the top graduates in economics and law from Tokyo University, the most prestigious university in Japan. Japan's economy, like that of any nation, is constantly changing. Because of fluctuations in domestic and international demand for goods and services over time, some industries decline while others become very promising. Perhaps MITI's most important two objectives are to simultaneously assist some sectors of the economy to manage decline successfully while nurturing other businesses with great promise for future growth.

In the 1960s and 1970s, because of great world demand for chemicals, times were good for Japan's petrochemical industry. By the 1980s demand had dropped drastically, however, and the industry faced major cutbacks with potential job losses for thousands of employees. MITI assumed a leadership role in assisting twelve major Japanese chemical companies to agree upon a plan to cut back production uniformly. Thanks to this agree-

¹⁶ Ibid. Japanese education is described in detail in Chapter 6.

ment, chemical companies were better prepared to divert resources to other promising business activities and fewer employees lost their jobs.

While the chemical industry declined in the 1980s, Japanese computer companies appeared to have an extremely bright future. A major reason Japanese computer companies were so well positioned to take advantage of increasing worldwide demand is that years ago MITI planners realized the great economic growth potential of the industry. In summer 1982 MITI began a research project designed to assist Japanese industry in the development of highly sophisticated Random Access Memory (RAM) computer chips. The cooperative effort, which included five leading Japanese companies and over \$300 million of government and private industry money, was an important reason Japan later captured over half of the world market for RAM chips.

MITI is not always successful in its efforts to assist business. For example, MITI officials advised Japanese auto makers not to attempt to compete with U.S. companies in the international market. Still, the Japanese have managed to achieve a much higher level of business-government cooperation than Americans and Western Europeans.¹⁷

Although Japan is famous for government-business cooperation, perhaps the highest level of cooperation within all of Japanese society is found within the typical major Japanese company. In fact, the industrial relations system in most large Japanese companies is both a crucial reason the Japanese economy is successful and a subject of serious study by businesspeople throughout the world.

Large companies in Japan practice what some economists label *welfare corporatism*. The Japanese company, instead of being only a place where employees trade their work for wages, provides much more for workers than money. Most large Japanese companies grant employees benefits such as low-cost housing, access to recreational and vacation facilities, and attractive savings programs. Our friend, Tanaka Sanosuke, could afford to purchase his first house and car because of handsome loans and discounts provided by Nissan.

Salary in large Japanese companies is most often determined by the seniority system, which some scholars believe to be rooted in Confucianism. An employee who has more years with the company than a fellow worker will, regardless of ability, usually have higher company standing and earn more money than the younger worker.

Perhaps most important, a majority of workers in large companies such as Sony, Hitachi, and Nissan are guaranteed a job for life. This means that management will go to extreme lengths, even if a company is in great financial difficulty, not to lay workers off. For example, when Nippon

¹⁷ "How Japan Guides Industries," *New York Times*, Wednesday, May 17, 1983.

Steel Company recently closed a blast furnace near Tokyo, the company set up an agricultural subsidiary and gave displaced steelworkers jobs raising cattle.¹⁸

In return, Japanese workers in big companies have a much different attitude toward their jobs than do most workers elsewhere. To most Japanese workers, the company is not just a job but a community in which workers will be members most of their lives. It is no surprise that many Japanese workers exhibit strong feelings of company loyalty when compared with Americans or Europeans.

The sense of loyalty and community in large companies is also reinforced by several other factors, including the structure of Japanese labor unions, a relatively egalitarian workplace atmosphere, and wide participation by workers and managers in decisions that affect the company.

In the United States and Western Europe, workers typically belong to craft unions. Therefore, one large American factory might contain six to ten unions representing several different trades. In Japan, the majority of unionized workers belong to company or enterprise unions. The typical Japanese labor union is made up of the employees of a single company, regardless of their occupation. Mr. Tanaka and his co-workers, for example, all belong to the Nissan union.

The Japanese union system tends to help workers realize that, for better or worse, they share the fate of the company. Japanese management often provide company financial data to union leaders, who, in turn, inform the membership. This process enables Japanese workers to understand that if the company does not do well they stand to lose such benefits as salary increases.

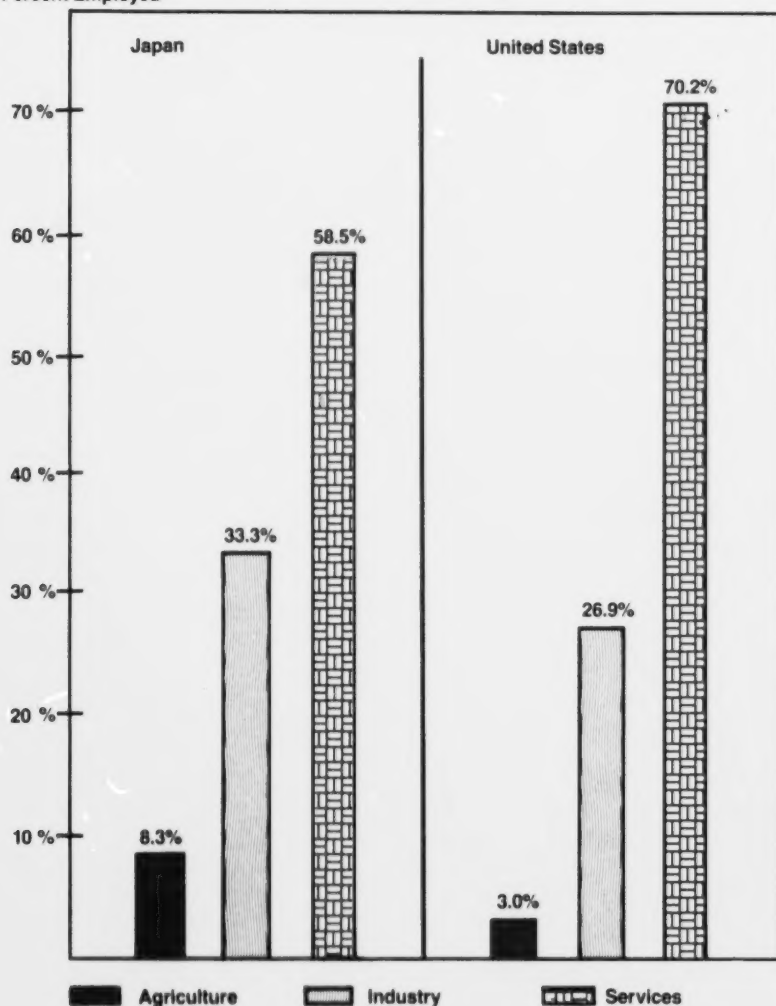
Another reason Japanese management and union leaders work together relatively well is that local union leaders do not answer to a national office as is often the case in the West. Because in the typical Japanese factory there is only one union, it is relatively easy for management to shift workers from one job to another. By contrast, many American and Western European managers in a single factory must abide by several different union contracts, which often contain provisions prohibiting changing a worker's job classification.

In large Japanese corporations there is usually much less distinction between managers and workers than in companies in other nations. In many Japanese companies it is difficult by sight to differentiate managers from workers, because everyone wears the same work clothes. Typically, Japanese executives do not have separate offices, eat in different cafeterias, or have special reserved parking places, as is true in many Western companies. Also in Japan the difference between salaries of college-

¹⁸ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, p. 245.

CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Percent Employed



Contemporary employment structure, Japan and the United States. By the late 1980s, although Japan still had more people employed in agriculture and manufacturing than did the United States, structure of employment in both countries was similar. In 1950, before the economic miracle, almost half of Japan's workforce were farmers. Data from Anzai, *Japan 1989: An International Comparison*, p. 21. Original artwork by Gayle Barrett.

educated executives and assembly line workers with the same experience is usually much less than in the United States.

Usually Japanese assembly line workers are much more active in company decision making than workers in other countries. In the late 1940s and early 1950s Edwards Deming, an American statistician and college professor, after unsuccessfully attempting to convince American corporate managers to involve assembly workers in production decisions, traveled to Japan for a series of lectures. A number of large Japanese companies quickly adopted quality control circles, a major idea of Deming. Quality control circles are groups of six to twelve workers in the same assembly section who meet regularly to identify, discuss, and pass on to management possible innovations for improvement of efficiency and product quality.

Today the Japanese have made Edwards Deming and quality control circles famous all over the world. Japanese companies consistently produce fine products because millions of ordinary workers in quality control circles formulate useful suggestions on how to improve work processes or product quality, and these are adopted by management. In Toyota motor company alone in a recent year employees turned in 1.9 million suggestions, or an average of 39 per employee. Ninety-five percent of the suggestions were adopted by the company.¹⁹

The emphasis in large Japanese corporations on a wide range of employee benefits, labor-management cooperation, and employee involvement has paid off handsomely. In the last twenty years the volume of Japanese production per worker-hour rose approximately three times as fast as in the United States, and today Japan leads all nations in the productivity of its workforce.²⁰

There is a final human factor—the incredible capacity of the Japanese for hard work—that although difficult to measure, is perhaps the biggest reason for Japan's economic triumph. As of the late 1980s Japanese industrial workers averaged three to five hours a week more than their counterparts in German, French, American, and British industry. Furthermore, statistics now indicate that the number of Japanese who work overtime on a weekly basis has increased over the past few years.²¹

¹⁹ "Not a Day Lost in Dispute by Toyota in 30 Years," *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 22, 1983.

²⁰ Labor productivity statistics from Yoshiro Kurisaka, "Japan's Economy: Strong but Weak," in John J. Cogan and Donald O. Schneider, eds., *Perspectives on Japan: A Guide for Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983), p. 44; and Yoichi Anzai, ed., *Japan 1989: An International Comparison* (Tokyo: Keizai Koho Center, 1988), p. 70.

²¹ Anzai, *Japan 1989*, p. 68; and Douglas Ostrom, "Overtime Increasing in Japan," *JEI Report*, No. 10B (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, March 11, 1988), p. 5.

In Japan Saturday mornings are part of the normal work week for most corporations and businesses. Although the Japanese government is attempting to initiate policies to shorten the work week, less than 10 percent of Japanese employees receive two full days off a week. Also it is quite common for Japanese professionals and corporate managers to go out after work for drinks or dinner with work associates almost daily. Although this time is not counted in official statistics as hours worked, nevertheless a great deal of work is often conducted in these evening social encounters.²²

Numerous reasons have been cited as to why the Japanese work so hard. These include the influence of Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, the great need to rebuild Japan after World War II, and, because their country is so resource poor, the survival mentality of many Japanese. Even though observers of Japanese life often disagree over why Japanese work so hard, no explanation of Japan's economic success can fail to ignore this important human aspect of economic life in Japan.

THE JAPANESE ECONOMY: PROBLEMS

In studying Japan's geography, you found that a lack of natural resources and living space has important negative economic effects upon Japanese life. The Japanese must import most raw materials needed for industrial production and, in part because of lack of living space, housing prices are quite high relative to other advanced economies. Successes notwithstanding, the Japanese are plagued by other economic problems.

The Japanese corporate welfare system with its worker benefits, including lifetime employment, is not a characteristic of the majority of Japanese companies. While approximately 35 percent of all Japanese workers, mostly male employees of large companies, enjoy lifetime employment and other benefits, conditions can be much different for employees of small Japanese firms.²³

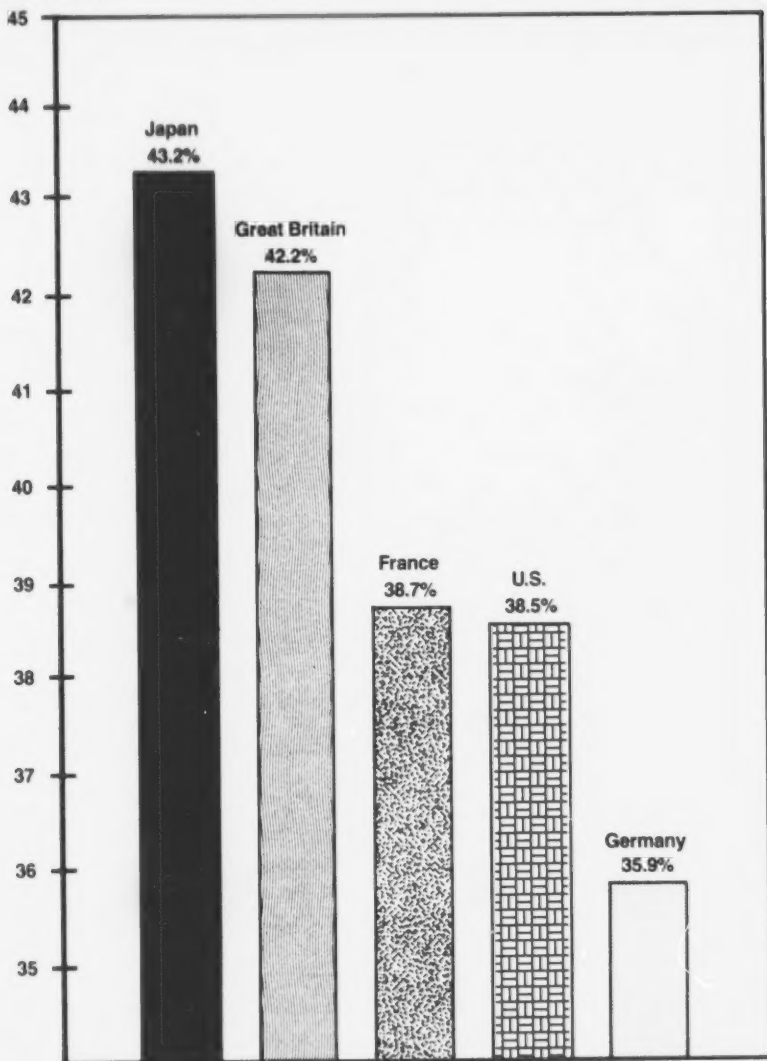
The majority of small Japanese companies do not manufacture finished products, but produce and supply component parts for large corporations such as Sony or Toyota. Workers in these small companies, often female or not particularly well-educated men, receive little of the benefits or high wages enjoyed by employees of large companies. Furthermore, when recessions occur, workers in small companies often lose their jobs as large companies cut back on orders. Overall, conditions in Japan's small

²² Douglas Ostrom, "Shorter Workweek in Japan," *JEI Report*, No. 16B (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, April 22, 1988), p. 8.

²³ Schnitzer, *Comparative Economic Systems*, p. 192.

**SELECTED COUNTRIES
HOURS WORKED IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

(Hours/Week)



Selected countries, hours worked in manufacturing industry (1977-1987). The hours represented on this graph do not include the time Japanese spend after hours socializing with colleagues from work. Often business is the major topic of conversation. Data provided by the Keizai Koho Center.

companies and businesses are so much less desirable than life in major corporations that economists use the term *two-tiered* when describing the Japanese economy.

Conditions for employees and overall productivity are also not particularly high in many of Japan's wholesale and retail establishments. Although Japan has only half the population of the United States, currently it has more wholesale distributors and just 10 percent fewer retail stores than the United States. Although the number of larger and more efficient Japanese distribution outlets is growing, the oversupply of wholesalers and small retail stores is a major factor behind high Japanese consumer prices, since excessive levels of wholesalers and small retailers' high costs cause significant price markups.²⁴

The inefficient wholesale and retail distribution system is only one reason Japanese pay much higher prices for food than do Americans or Western Europeans. Because of small farm sizes and agricultural land scarcity, farmers can produce only about two-thirds of Japan's food, forcing consumers to pay high prices for imports. Also the Japanese government raises consumer food costs even higher by subsidizing farmers and preventing certain foreign agricultural imports. Thus the average Japanese family now spends two to three times more money annually on food than an American family. High consumer prices, particularly in food and housing, are a major reason why the Japanese often refer to themselves as a poor people living in a rich country.

Even the large Japanese corporations are not problem free. Their very successes in international business meant that by the late 1980s overall value of Japanese exports was much higher than the value of goods and services the Japanese were buying from other countries. In 1987, even though Japan bought more U.S. products than did any other country in the world except Canada, Japanese companies sold Americans approximately \$60 billion more products than the Japanese bought from American companies.²⁵

Probably the major reason for this large trade imbalance is that among consumers on both sides of the Pacific, the Japanese now enjoy a better reputation than Americans for producing quality products. However, in some respects, trade is more of a political than an economic issue. Many Americans feel strongly that Japan is unfair to the United States because the Japanese don't buy enough American products. Disgruntled Ameri-

²⁴ "Development and Characteristics of Japan's Distribution System," *JEI Report*, No. 28A (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, July 24, 1987), p. 2.

²⁵ "Statistical Profile: Japan's Economy in 1987 and International Transactions of Japan and the United States in 1987," *JEI Report*, No. 37A (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, September 30, 1988), p. 35.



Most of the shops on this busy street represent the bottom of Japan's two-tiered economy. Workers in these small retail firms are likely to receive low pay and few benefits. Photo courtesy of Linda Hooper.

cans make two specific charges against the Japanese: the Japanese government imposes too many restrictions on foreign business, and the Japanese, for cultural reasons, tend not to buy foreign products.

Although historically the Japanese government has protected industry, most restrictions on imports have recently been abolished. Economists now hotly debate how much the few remaining Japanese government trade barriers affect the American trade deficit with Japan. The cultural allegation is much more controversial because it is almost impossible to collect specific information on how culture might influence consumer spending. While many American companies have failed in Japan because consumers did not buy their products, other companies such as Coca-Cola and Schick have enjoyed tremendous successes in the Japanese market.

If the large trade imbalance between Japan and the United States is not reduced, eventually the U.S. government could severely restrict the level of Japanese imports. Since the United States is Japan's leading customer worldwide, the Japanese government is attempting to influence consumers to buy more imports in order to reduce the current trade controversy.

Although the two-tiered economy, the relatively inefficient wholesale and retail distribution system, high food and housing prices, and the trade controversy are all serious problems, the Japanese, because they have created one of the world's leading economies, now enjoy the greatest prosperity in their nation's history.²⁶

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Real Gross National Product
- MITI
- Japanese welfare corporatism
- Lifetime employment
- Enterprise unions
- Quality control circles
- Two-tiered economy

²⁶ In addition to the problems described in this chapter, pollution and the financial position of the Japanese elderly are two problems rooted partly in the overemphasis Japan placed on economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Although Japan has made much progress in reducing pollution, the financial position of the elderly is a serious enough problem that it is described in a later chapter.

Review Questions

1. Write a short paragraph in which you use specific evidence from the chapter you've read to support or refute the following statement: The Japanese economy, by the beginning of World War II, was quite backward by world standards.
2. Three reasons for Japan's contemporary economic success are Japanese corporate concentration on expanding market shares, excellent technology utilization, and plentiful investment capital. Write a paragraph in which you explain in your own words how each of these contributes to a strong Japanese economy.
3. In a short paragraph identify and describe the major objectives of MITI.
4. Briefly describe in your own words several current problems in the Japanese economy.
5. Write a short paragraph in which you describe the difference between American and Japanese labor unions.

Essay Question

1. In an essay describe and assess welfare corporatism as it is practiced in Japan. In your opinion would it be possible, or economically advantageous, for American companies to adopt welfare corporatism?

In-Depth Learning

1. Sociological research indicates that American and Japanese workers have quite different work-related attitudes, habits, and values. The following is a comparative rating by leading Japan scholars of select characteristics of American and Japanese workers.*

Concern for quality—Japan

Japanese workers possess an almost religious desire to do jobs well. They pay great attention to detail. Many Americans just want to finish the job.

Initiative—United States

On an individual level, Americans are willing to take the lead. They are concerned with who gets credit for exceptional work.

Hard work—Japan

The work ethic is strong in both countries, but the experts give the Japanese a slight edge because they routinely put in extra hours. Their company is the central focus of their lives.

Ambition—United States

America's individualistic culture encourages workers to strive to get ahead.

*Rating based on "America vs Japan: Can U.S. Workers Compete?" *U.S. News and World Report*, September 2, 1985.

Japanese, though ambitious, try not to stand out, especially early in their careers.

Loyalty—Japan

The average Japanese worker expects to spend an entire career at one firm. Companies, in turn, take a paternalistic interest in employees.

Basic skills—Japan

Japan's schools produce graduates with good basic skills. Japanese learn discipline and good work habits that they transfer to the job.

Advanced skills—United States

A close call. Workers in both nations are highly educated, but the United States has more college graduates and white-collar professionals.

Reliability—Japan

Japanese are reluctant to show up late or call in sick, largely because they don't want to let down their bosses and co-workers. Many skip parts of their vacations.

Cooperativeness—Japan

Japanese subordinate individual concerns to group needs. This trait fosters a spirit of togetherness that is especially effective on the assembly line.

After examining the above data, either discuss with other students or write an essay that addresses the following questions: What are your reactions to these ratings? What is it about American/Japanese culture that causes workers in either country to possess the advantage for a particular work trait? If you were a company personnel manager, do you think your company would be better off with employees who possessed the positive characteristics for which Japanese workers are known, or employees who possess the positive characteristics exhibited by American workers? Cite evidence to support either answer.

2. Although, as you read, an American developed the idea of quality control circles, Japan was the first nation to make widespread use of this innovative productivity-enhancing tool. The great successes of the Japanese in labor productivity and management-labor relations has stimulated numbers of American manufacturing companies to adopt quality control circles. Survey local manufacturing plants to determine whether any industries in your area are utilizing quality control circles. Invite representatives from one or more companies who are involved in quality control circles to your class for a presentation.

Since Japan is now the second largest foreign investor in the United States there are Japanese-owned manufacturing plants in a number of American cities and states. If there is a Japanese plant in your community, it would be exciting to invite representatives from that firm as well as an American firm to your class to discuss quality control circles.

FURTHER READING

The Christopher and Reischauer books described at the end of Chapter 1 each have excellent sections on the Japanese economy. David Halberstam's *The Reckoning* (New York: Avon Books, 1986) is a superb comparison of the Ford and Nissan

companies. The book, which reads like a novel, is extremely enlightening if you are interested in getting an inside look at large American and Japanese corporations. G. C. Allen's *A Short Economic History of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) is a classic study in which Japanese economic history from the Meiji Period until the late 1970s is examined.

C H A P T E R



S I X

**JAPANESE
INSTITUTIONS**

INTRODUCTION

While living in the Akasaka district of Tokyo, you've noticed more and more interesting sights, sounds, and people. Elections for the national legislature, or Diet, are three weeks away and just recently you watched a Liberal Democratic Party candidate, surrounded by his supporters on a street corner, paint the eye of large wooden daruma doll for luck in the campaign. The daruma doll comes from a Buddhist story about a person who wished to attain enlightenment and sat in a lotus position for so long that he lost his legs. The doll is a symbol of persistence toward victory.¹ If the candidate is elected, he'll paint in the other eye at the victory party.

All during the campaigning you've heard trucks with loudspeakers blaring messages in the streets, and recently you toured the national Diet building, which is only a few minutes by taxi from your hotel. You are stimulated by the sights and sounds of Japanese politics to ask some fundamental questions about the institution of government.

Although from your reading of modern history you understand that Japan became a democracy during the American occupation, you question this fact since you just learned that the Liberal Democratic Party has elected every prime minister since the mid-1950s. How can such a situation be democratic, and are the Japanese people happy with this arrangement? You learned earlier that historically, political power has been shared in Japan among several individuals and groups, many of whom are behind the scenes. Who are these individuals and groups that possess political power in modern Japan?

Schools interest you even more than Japanese government and politics. Recently you met Kurisaka Eiji, a young man who is a senior in a nearby high school. Although you've enjoyed meeting Eiji, the only times you've been able to see each other are Sunday afternoons. This is so because Eiji's life seems to be consumed by school and by preparations for university examinations which he will take a few months from now. Eiji reports that he spends about five hours a day after school studying, and four days a week, including Saturday afternoons, he attends a private cram school after his regular school ends. In these cram schools Eiji receives intensive instruction in Japanese language and mathematics.

Even though you are too polite to ask, you wonder if Eiji is a particularly slow student or if most Japanese high school seniors who wish to attend university must spend so much time working. You also wonder

¹ Daruma doll story taken from the elections section of Roberta Martin and Amy Heinrich, eds., *Contemporary Japan: A Teaching Workbook* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 7.

about the similarities and differences between Japanese and American schools and about the quality of Japan's educational system.

You are also interested in religion, and particularly how it is viewed and practiced in modern Japan. You now understand much more about Shinto and Buddhism than before, but recently you had some experiences that left you confused about Japanese and their religions. A few nights ago a religious organization called Soka Gakkai had a rally at Tokyo Stadium attended by over 80,000 people, including many teenagers and young people. Also, since you've been in Tokyo you've visited Sensoji Temple and the Meiji and Yasukuni shrines and always encountered throngs of people.

Yet you remember reading before you came to Japan that less than 20 percent of Japanese between the ages of 16 and 19 profess any religion at all. The author of the book in which you read this statistic also reported that this was the lowest percentage reported for young people in any major nation in the noncommunist world. If religion is such a minor part of Japanese life, why were there so many people present at the Soka Gakkai event and the temple and shrine?²

Government, schools, and religious groups are all examples of what sociologists call institutions, which are organizations that develop in any country because of basic societal needs. Japanese institutions, despite problems, are among the most successful in the world. We hope after reading about Japanese government and politics, education, and religion, you may agree that Japanese institutions are also quite unusual and highly interesting.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

In spite of one party dominance, Japan is indeed a democracy. Even though Japan became a full-fledged democracy with the 1947 Constitution, in many ways the country had been moving toward democratic government since the late nineteenth century. Certain aspects of Japan's political heritage are vital reasons why democracy, a form of government that unfortunately is very difficult to institutionalize in most countries, flourished in post-World War II Japan.

There were several features in Japanese pre-World War II society that provided a solid foundation for democracy later. Japan had long been a politically unified country when the democratic constitution was adopted.

² Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), p. 71.

Also the Japanese possessed an important ingredient for building a successful democratic society: a relatively high level of literacy nationwide. Despite periods of domestic turmoil, Japanese political history has been largely evolutionary and nonviolent as opposed to revolutionary and violent. This climate of stability proved to be a fertile one for the growth of mass democracy in Japan. Certain political institutions vital to the growth of democracy also evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1889 Meiji Constitution provided for a two-house legislature. If you read the chapter on modern history, you know that by the close of the First World War and all through the 1920s Japan had a parliamentary government.³ Also, beginning in 1925 all adult Japanese males enjoyed the right to vote. Although the military gained political dominance in the 1930s and early 1940s, by the time of the democratic reforms of 1947 the Japanese had already had experience with representative government.

The 1947 Constitution, written by the American occupation staff, gave Japan the basic governmental structure that exists today. The constitution provides for universal male and female suffrage and for an independent judicial branch. Also any questions about the further role of the emperor in Japanese government were settled, since the constitution limited the emperor to "not have powers related to government" and to be solely "a symbol of the state."⁴

The 1947 Constitution did not change the prefectural administrative governments that have existed since Meiji times. Today Japan has 47 prefectures, each with its own governor and legislature. Although prefectures are roughly analogous to U.S. states, there is a significant difference: while the prefectures have some control over such public policy matters as hiring secondary school teachers, they do not have nearly the autonomy from Tokyo that states have from Washington. One reason is that a substantial amount of prefectural funding comes from Tokyo.

A major innovation of the 1947 Constitution was to make the legislature, or Diet, the highest organ of state power with sole law-making authority. The bicameral Diet remained with a more powerful lower House of Representatives and a less powerful upper house, the House of Councillors, which replaced the pre-World War II nonelective House of Peers. The Japanese people elect representatives to the Diet and the party with the most seats in the House of Representatives then elects the executive or prime minister, who, in turn, selects cabinet ministers and other appointed officials.

³ In a parliamentary government such as in Great Britain or Japan, the leader of the political party that controls the most legislative seats becomes the prime minister. The prime minister is the chief executive.

⁴ Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 443.

Presently there are 512 members of the House of Representatives, elected for four-year terms from 130 districts throughout Japan. However, the constitution gives the prime minister the power any time to dissolve the House of Representatives and hold new elections for that body.

The 252 members of the upper house, the House of Councillors, are elected for six-year terms, and every three years half of them face an election. One hundred of the members are elected nationwide while the remaining 152 members are elected from each of the 47 prefectures. Each prefecture is guaranteed a minimum of two seats in the House of Councillors, and the larger prefectures are allocated more seats.⁵

Beneath all the color and festival-like atmosphere of campaigns, including the shooting of firecrackers the morning of elections, Japanese candidates are similar in their activities to politicians in other democracies. Candidates for the Diet in Japan, like candidates for the U.S. Congress, must spend increasingly large amounts of money to be elected. Diet candidates also work their districts, attending temple and shrine ceremonies, sake and noodle parties, and shaking hands with thousands of constituents. Still, there are elements of Japanese campaigns that are quite different from what occurs in the United States before elections.

Official campaigns in Japan are much shorter than in the United States, being limited by law to only 40 days, although many Japanese politicians, like their counterparts elsewhere, are always unofficially campaigning. During the official campaign period door-to-door campaigning is prohibited by law, and the government television channel gives free two and one-half minute TV slots to major party candidates. National elections, which are always on Sundays, draw a much higher percentage of eligible voters in Japan than in the United States. Approximately 70 to 75 percent of eligible Japanese vote, compared with 50 percent of Americans in comparable elections.

The election system for the Diet in Japan is quite different from the American congressional system. Members of the U.S. Congress are elected from a congressional district, where a person votes for only one candidate. Usually, there are only two serious candidates in the United States for a congressional seat in a district, and the candidate who receives a majority of the votes wins the election.

Although Japanese may also vote for only one candidate, each district in Japan usually contains three to five House of Representative seats, so the winners are the three to five candidates who received the most votes among perhaps ten to twelve candidates running in a district. Therefore,

⁵ Information on legislative bodies taken from Hans H. Baerwald, *Party Politics in Japan* (Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1986), pp. 37-62, and Yoichi Anzai, ed., *Japan 1989: An International Comparison* (Tokyo: Keizai Center, 1988), p. 96.

the winner of a Diet seat in a Japanese election may do so by obtaining only 20 to 30 percent of the vote, an almost impossible situation in the United States. While the United States has a strong two-party tradition, Japan has five major political parties. Since there is more than one winner from each district, often candidates who belong to the same party will compete for the same seats in an election. This is especially true in the case of Japan's largest political party, the Liberal Democrats, or LDP.

In the LDP, candidates rely more on personal organizations of voters in districts than on their political party. These personal organizations of supporters, or *koenkai*, often represent various organizations including business, women's, religious, and agricultural groups. They support an individual candidate for the Diet in hopes that he or she will do them favors if elected. Even though parties such as the Socialists and Communists represent certain broad philosophies and belief systems, since candidates from the same parties compete against each other for the same seats, a candidate's personal organization often matters much more in Japanese elections than his or her stance on issues or ideology.⁶ American political parties are less oriented toward ideology than are the West European, and Japanese political parties are often even less ideological than parties in the United States.

In addition to the Liberal Democratic Party, other major parties represented in the Diet are the Japanese Socialist Party, Komeito, the Japanese Communist Party, and the Democratic Socialist Party. The Japanese Socialist Party, the largest opposition party to the LDP, appeals to many educated people in government service and education. The very powerful Japanese teachers' union is a major supporter of the Japanese Socialist Party.

Komeito, or the "Clean Government" party, founded in the 1960s by Soka Gakkai, a religious sect, is the second largest opposition party to the LDP in the Diet. Komeito appeals primarily to the followers of Soka Gakkai, who tend to be poor people living in the cities.

The Japanese Communist Party, the third largest party in the Diet, is quite moderate compared with communist parties in other countries. In the 1970s the Japanese Communist Party announced that if it ever came to power it would allow private business, respect civil liberties, and permit multi-party democracy.

The Democratic Socialist Party, the fourth largest opposition party, broke away from the Socialist Party in 1959 because the founders of the Democratic Socialists were more in favor of strong defense ties with the

⁶ Ideology is the doctrine or belief system that guides a political party.

あなたの意見を聞きたい。  自民党



平和を
求めた50年

日本共産党

船 隻 運 送 會 同 同 船 船 隻 船 隻 船 隻

In Japanese cities, elections mean campaign posters everywhere. The above is a Liberal Democratic Party poster and below is a Communist Party poster. The LDP is often vague on issues and the major theme of the poster is that the LDP likes to listen to voters' opinions. The Communist Party poster, which depicts U.S. tanks at the foot of Mount Fuji, reiterates a long-held JCP position: ending U.S.-Japanese military alliances in order to make Japan a neutral country. Photos courtesy of the Library of Congress.

United States. The Democratic Socialists receive most of their support from a nationwide federation of unions representing factory workers.⁷

Although all of the above parties influence government policy, they are in the shadows of the LDP, which since its inception in 1955, has elected all of Japan's prime ministers and controlled the House of Representatives. The LDP, which resulted from a merger of two political parties, is relatively conservative. It has won the support of the Japanese people for so long primarily because of the unprecedented economic good times the nation has enjoyed under its leadership. Even though the LDP is generally pro-private business, it is one of the least ideological of all Japanese political parties.

The LDP Diet members usually belong to one of three or four factions within the Diet. Each faction has a leader who is usually interested not as much in advancing a set of political principles as in becoming prime minister. Since the LDP usually controls the Diet, since the formation of the party the LDP party president has automatically become prime minister. This party president is elected in a national election in which LDP members vote and in which the Diet factions are highly active.

LDP Diet members, in return for belonging to a faction and supporting a particular leader in his quest for the prime ministership, receive help from that faction in their own campaigns and get support from the faction in obtaining jobs or other government-related benefits for their constituents. Also, when a prime minister chooses a cabinet, or when legislation is formulated, the important factions play a role in the horse trading that occurs.

In Japan actual lawmaking at the national level is quite different from in the United States. Since Japan has a parliamentary system, and the Japanese prime minister is also a member of the leading party in the Diet, there are never policy conflicts between the legislative majority and the executive. In the United States, conflicts between the executive and legislative branches over proposed legislation are quite common since often the Democratic Party will have a majority in the Congress while a Republican holds the office of President. Also, although the Diet has a committee system and bills must pass both houses, as is the case in the United States, in Japan most of the committee action and legislative votes are formalities.

In the Japanese Diet an LDP organization called the Policy Affairs Research Council has the ultimate power to grant or deny party approval for bills. The PARC has separate divisions that each correspond to government ministries such as MITI or to Diet standing committees such as budget. All LDP members in both houses are members of one or two

⁷ Barbara Wanner, "The Opposition Parties in Japanese Politics," *JEI Report*, No. 41A (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, October 22, 1988), pp. 1-13.

PARC divisions. It is in these divisions and then later in another committee of the PARC that bills are first introduced and actually shaped.

Japanese Diet members, unlike members of Congress in the United States, do not create most legislation. Instead, career bureaucrats, who are not Diet members but work in the various government ministries, are responsible for formulating most bills. In turn, the cabinet ministers who are also Diet members actually introduce the bills that survive the PARC in formal legislative committees and on the house floor. The value of the Diet committees and floor debate is primarily to allow the opposition parties to criticize the government legislation.

The fact that many of the bills that end up as laws in Japan originate in the bureaucracy underscores another difference between the Japanese and American legislative processes and between government in general in each country. In Japan, the senior career officials who work for such ministries as MITI, Finance, and Foreign Affairs constitute the most powerful bureaucracy of any democratic country. Certainly they exert much more power in shaping public policy than do their counterparts in the United States. Even though the Diet members who occupy cabinet positions are the nominal policymakers, often they reflect the views of the senior civil servants in the ministries who have the real expertise on the issues.

The Japanese bureaucracy is not only powerful but competent. Each year the national government ministries recruit new career officers identified as potential future ministry leaders from the very best universities in Japan, especially Tokyo University. Although the hours are long and the pay is low, compared with that of Japanese corporations, historically, serving Japan in a government bureaucracy is considered to be very prestigious work and competition for positions is fierce.

During their careers, top bureaucrats are rotated from position to position so they get wide experience. When a group of senior bureaucrats reaches their mid-50s, one is usually selected to be the senior career official in the ministry and the rest retire to high-level positions in industry, or increasingly to run for and be elected to the Diet. In the Diet, the ministries, and big business, there are almost always people who have known each other in the past through working in the bureaucracy, and this situation makes negotiations and compromise among these three major actors in Japanese politics much easier than in many countries.

Despite one-party dominance, the shaping of bills behind the scenes rather than in the formal legislative process, and the strong influence of the bureaucracy in lawmaking, ultimately Japan is a government of the people. The LDP has retained the prime ministership since it was founded because the Japanese people are, in general, happy with the way the party has contributed to economic prosperity. In Japan, as in other democracies, special-interest groups make their views known by lobbying government

ministries and Diet members. If pressure is great enough, government officials respond by changing laws to meet the needs of these groups.

Also the opposition parties exert much more influence over the legislative process than their numbers might indicate. The opposition parties use formal Diet committee meetings and floor debate, which the press covers extensively, to inform the public of their views on the issues. The opposition parties in Japan exert greater influence over lawmaking than what a casual observer might think, because Japan is much more of a consensual society than Western democracies. This means that in Japan the majority must do more to placate the minority than in other countries, or they risk trouble.

Several times in its history the LDP in the Diet has used its majority to ramrod legislation through without consulting the minority parties, and later lost public support. The outstanding example occurred in the 1960 controversy over the renewal of the security treaty with the United States. There was a great public outcry and violent demonstrations when it appeared that the LDP was ignoring opposition views, and the LDP prime minister and cabinet were forced to resign. The LDP learned a major lesson, and since then when an important bill is crafted the views of the other parties are solicited. If opposition is too great, the legislation will be changed, or never introduced in the first place.

Japanese government does not work perfectly. Susceptibility of high ranking government officials to illegal financial contributions from special-interest groups looking for influence as well as the inability of the government to respond quickly to problems are two much discussed problems. Still, the institution has worked extremely well since World War II, making Japan one of the most stable democracies on earth.⁸

EDUCATION: TOTAL SOCIETAL COMMITMENT

In the past few years, as Japanese industry has increased investments in the United States, more Japanese families have moved here for one to three years. Riverdale, New York, a suburb of New York City, is a community with a large concentration of Japanese families. American educators in the Riverdale school district, upon enrolling Japanese children, were puzzled because families always requested two sets of textbooks for each child. Finally, teachers learned that the reason each family requested two sets of books was that Japanese mothers wanted their own

⁸ The information about Japanese politics taken from Francis R. Valeo and Charles E. Morrison, *The Japanese Diet and the U.S. Congress* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1983), pp. 1-84, and Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, pp. 211-35.

textbooks so they could better prepare to help their children with homework. The Riverdale case is only one of many examples of the total societal commitment to education among Japanese.⁹

The Japanese are regarded by many as perhaps the world's most education-conscious society, and there is a strong case to be made that Japan is number one in the world in the educational achievement of the general population. In international standardized tests Japanese students at all ages consistently are the world's best in mathematics achievement and are at or near the top in science.

Linguists consider Japanese to be one of the world's most difficult written languages, yet estimates are that as much as 99 percent of the Japanese adult population is literate. In contrast, only 80 to 85 percent of Americans can read or write well enough to be classified as literate. Currently, well over 90 percent of adult Japanese are high school graduates compared with 75 percent of adult Americans.¹⁰

The Japanese exhibit their high, by world standards, levels of education in numerous ways other than standardized test performance or attainment of high school diplomas. The Japanese economic successes with which you are now familiar are in large part due to the high educational levels of average workers. In Japan it is common for workers with high school diplomas on factory floors to use statistics, work with complex charts and graphs, and quickly grasp written technical manuals. There is substantial evidence also that the famous Japanese propensity for hard work and diligent attention to detail is, in part, learned in school.¹¹

That the Japanese are among the world's most educated peoples is apparent in aspects of society other than the classroom or the workplace. Japanese are avid readers for pleasure. In any given year Japanese publishers come out with approximately 35,000 new titles, about the same as the number of new books published annually in the United States, which has twice Japan's population. Approximately 93 percent of Japanese read newspapers regularly, and per capita newspaper sales in Japan are higher than any other country in the world except Sweden. Anyone who has ridden a Japanese train or subway knows that almost everyone seems to be reading a book, magazine, or newspaper.¹²

Historical, economic, and cultural factors have all contributed to the Japanese passion for and success in education. Education has always been

⁹ Merry White, *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), p. 14.

¹⁰ General description of Japanese education taken from Benjamin Duke, *The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 25-119.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, pp. 194-96.

considered important in Confucianism, which is still influential in Japan. Throughout Japanese history, and even today, teachers at all levels enjoy a high level of respect awarded educators in almost no other nation.

Japan was successful educationally by world standards long before present times. As you read, by late Tokugawa times literacy rates were comparable to those in Western Europe and the United States. One of the key elements of the Charter Oath of 1868 establishing the new Meiji government was the challenge "To seek knowledge throughout the world."¹³ As Japan rushed to catch up with the West in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, education remained extremely important. The American occupation of Japan, in creating much greater access for the Japanese people to secondary and higher education, further enhanced the historic national commitment to education.

Undoubtedly much of Japanese attachment for learning is part of a national survival mentality. Since Japan is a crowded country and lacks almost all natural resources, people are the greatest resource, and high levels of mass education are essential to maximize human potential.

The Japanese are also fortunate in that a direct positive relationship exists between several aspects of Japanese culture and educational success. Although the situation is changing, fewer Japanese mothers work outside of the home than is true in many other industrialized countries, and it is considered a primary responsibility of Japanese mothers to carefully monitor their children's educational progress. The Japanese are a homogeneous people, a fact that makes the task of mass education easier than in countries in which people speak different languages and have diverse values. Since World War II, Japan has become perhaps the most middle-class country on earth; traditionally in any culture members of the middle class are the most avid believers in education.

Although historical, economic, and cultural factors are important, the curricula and structure of Japan's educational institutions have also contributed greatly to the impressive educational attainments of the Japanese. What are today's Japanese schools like, and in what ways is education in Japan and the United States similar and different?

Japanese elementary and secondary schools are part of a centralized national school system under the leadership of the Ministry of Education. In the United States, education is a function left primarily to state and local governments; it is not even mentioned in our constitution. Consequently, in this country state and local governments are responsible for the curriculum and for 90 percent of the funds for public schools. In Japan the national government funds approximately one-half the public school bill each year, and Ministry of Education bureaucrats prepare courses of study for every

¹³ Duke, *The Japanese School*, p. 15.

elementary and high school subject which must be followed by all public and private elementary and high school teachers. The Japanese government also requires all elementary and secondary students to attend school 240 days a year, while in the United States, although there is variance by state, students usually attend about 180 days each year.

Even though the centralized nature of Japan's educational system creates some problems, the Japanese enjoy great advantages as a result of this structure. In Japan, because the national government finances such a large share of education, children and young people in the wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods and prefectures attend public schools in which relatively uniform amounts of money are spent annually on the education of each student. In the United States, by contrast, schools in affluent communities and states in any given school year spend large amounts of money on the education of students while schools in poor communities or states spend half as much money or less on education per student in the same time period.

Because there is national agreement in Japan on what students should learn in each grade, a much larger percentage of students are likely to learn the same content than in the United States, where the content learned can vary greatly from state to state. Because it is a national law that all Japanese students must attend school 240 days a year including half days on Saturdays while most U.S. students attend only 180 days, when the average Japanese student completes high school he or she will have spent almost two more full years in school than the average American student. A longer school year alone is undoubtedly one reason Japanese, on average, learn more in elementary and high school than Americans.

During the occupation the Japanese adopted the American 6-3-3 elementary, junior, and senior high school model. For the most part, the subjects Japanese students study are not that different from subjects studied by Americans. However, foreign language is an important exception. In Japan, starting in junior high school, everyone is required to study foreign language and almost all students choose English. In the United States usually only students who plan to attend college take foreign language at the secondary level.

Another exception is education in the arts. In Japanese elementary schools art and music are required subjects, and by the end of sixth grade every student can play two simple musical instruments. Often in American public schools art and music are looked upon as frills that can be cut if money becomes scarce.

What is really different about what occurs in classrooms in Japan and the United States is, in general, the higher level of emphasis placed upon academic achievement by Japanese students and teachers. The Japanese treatment of school work as extremely serious business is due in part to



Elementary school is very relaxing for Japanese children compared with junior and senior high. Photo courtesy of Linda Hooper.

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factors already described, and also is a result of the great influence of the examination system upon students, teachers, and parents.

Virtually all Japanese students take examinations for admission to high schools, and the 40 to 45 percent who go on to college or university take a second set of examinations three years later. These examinations are important rites of passage for most Japanese young people and of much interest to the nation as a whole. The public and private high schools in any Japanese city are rated by the general public from top to bottom academically, on the basis of the quality of universities that their graduates tend to enter. Therefore, ninth-grade students who wish to have a good chance later of passing examinations to attend a high-rated university work very hard to pass entrance examinations for one of the better high schools.

Since examination scores are the primary means for determining admission to high schools and universities, the number of cram schools, or *juku schools*, in Japan have grown tremendously in recent years. Today 40 to 50 percent of all junior and senior high students attend *juku* schools after regular school hours and on Saturday afternoons to prepare for examinations. Therefore our friend Eiji, if he is a typical *juku* attendee, is far from a below-average student; in the United States it is usually below-average students who are tutored after school. Although Japanese young people having trouble with school work attend *juku*, they are outnumbered by average and above-average students who receive outside extra help with their studies.¹⁴

University entrance examinations, taken by almost half of Japan's high school seniors, vary depending upon whether institutions are private or public. Private universities, which with notable exceptions are not nearly as prestigious as public universities, give examinations on a battery of subjects at one time. The famous national universities, as well as prefectural universities, now give all prospective entrants a general test in January covering seven subjects: English, math, Japanese language and literature, and two subjects each in science and social studies. Early in March the second-stage exams are given separately by each university to students who score high enough on the first-stage examinations. The second-stage examination material is based upon the student's individual prospective major. Although the system is severe, there is a certain equality of opportunity at work. No matter how rich or influential one's father is, for example, if a student does not score high enough to enter Tokyo University, he or she won't be admitted.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cynthia Hearn Dorfman, ed., *Japanese Education Today* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), p. 12.

¹⁵ Kanehide Seo, *The Life of a Senior High School Student* (Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1986), p. 41.

Many very good Japanese high school seniors who are seeking admission to elite institutions such as Tokyo University fail examinations on their first try and spend a year, or sometimes even two or three years, studying for and attempting the examinations again. On average about one-third of all Japanese young people admitted to college annually have spent at least a year after high school graduation studying for examinations.¹⁶

For Japanese young people, doing well on university entrance examinations and gaining admission to the right university is extremely important because it directly affects later employment opportunities. In Japan many of the large companies and government institutions hire new managerial-level employees from a few universities, and the university to which a student is admitted is usually far more important in determining future job offers than academic performance while in college.

Therefore, life is particularly arduous for high school juniors and seniors who are seeking admission to the best, and often even average universities. Japanese students, who are required to memorize enormous amounts of information to pass the university examinations, tell each other that if one expects to pass the examinations he or she had best sleep no more than four hours a night during the senior year.

Although Japanese schools are much more work than play for ninth graders and high school seniors cramming for examinations, many students in other grades participate in extracurricular activities. In Japanese junior and senior highs, clubs are a regular part of the weekly schedule and schools offer many of the same competitive sports that are found in American schools, including baseball, basketball, and track. Large numbers of Japanese students also belong to clubs for judo, swimming, and kendo, a form of Japanese fencing.

Extracurricular activities are encouraged by Japanese educators, in part because it is believed that through sports and clubs students learn to work together in groups, a skill considered to be vital in Japanese society. Japanese teachers and parents also consider learning of appropriate behavior to be as important as academic subjects. Although discipline problems in Japanese schools have grown in recent years, student behavior in classrooms is extremely orderly compared with that in the United States. Almost all Japanese students wear uniforms, and students even clean the school regularly, a practice that helps teamwork and respect for the school building. Another value that is stressed from the beginning of a Japanese student's school days is the importance of expending great effort on any worthwhile task. Japanese students are taught that most people have very similar innate ability but it is the amount of effort that determines whether

¹⁶ Dorfman, *Japanese Education Today*, p. 45.



Almost all Japanese junior and senior high school students wear uniforms to school. The junior high students in this photo are in summer uniforms. Photograph taken by author.

a person succeeds or fails. The famous Japanese work ethic is, in part, a result of the emphasis schools place on the value of great effort.

Three behaviors that most Japanese high school students don't engage in are drinking and drug use, after-school work, and dating. Laws and societal mores concerning drinking and drug use are quite strict, and teenage drug and alcohol problems in Japan are minuscule compared with the United States. Japanese parents and teachers consider school too important to allow students to have after-school jobs. One recent survey of high school students found that 63 percent of the American students worked part-time, compared with only 21 percent of Japanese teenagers.¹⁷

For Japanese high school students, dating those of the opposite sex is usually discouraged. If a couple are known to be dating, parents expect teachers to admonish them that they are too young. It is little surprise, therefore, that Japanese tend to marry three or four years later, on average, than Americans.

Although the Japanese educational system is one of the world's very best, like any institution it is not without problems. The national system, with its detailed course outlines in every subject, and the homogeneity of Japanese society make school very difficult for the Japanese student who is different. Extremely gifted students and slow learners don't usually receive the individual attention such students often find in American schools.

The stress on conformity is particularly painful for the growing number of Japanese young people who live abroad with their parents and return to Japanese schools. Returnees find the school regimentation stressful and their performance on university exams jeopardized because their teachers in other countries emphasized critical thinking or questioning whereas in Japanese high schools rote memorization is the key to examination success. Many Japanese consider the university examination system itself to be a negative aspect of education because it places tremendous pressure on young people and because examinations play too much of a role in determining a young person's future.

Japanese universities in general have more problems than institutions of higher learning in other countries. It is very difficult, interestingly enough, to motivate university students. Once students are admitted to a particular university, they are assured of being eligible for certain kinds of employment upon graduation. Also, Japanese young people know that once they graduate from university, they will more than likely be working very, very hard for years to come. Therefore, many college students tend to neglect their studies but they graduate because many Japanese university courses are easy to pass. Despite these problems, Japan's educational

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

system is extremely impressive, primarily because of the impressive levels of knowledge that average students exhibit upon completing high school.

RELIGION

Although more important to Japan's past than to today, religious institutions are still powerful forces in shaping the behavior and attitudes of many Japanese.

As you learned earlier, when Japanese young people (actually Japanese of all ages) are surveyed about their religion, they do not claim specific beliefs and tend in general to be vague on the subject. Although Japan is a very secular society, what these surveys also illustrate is how different Japanese religion is from the common Western religions of Christianity and Judaism. What are these differences and how do religious traditions affect the everyday lives of Japanese people?

Most Japanese, for example, unlike Christians or Jews, don't strongly profess a belief in any one god because there have always been many deities in Japanese religions. Many Japanese believe in Shinto kami, various Buddhist gods, and folk deities. The acceptance of many gods causes Japanese generally to be more tolerant of religious diversity than Westerners. Also the Western concepts of sin and forgiveness are not present in most Japanese religions. Rather, Japanese believe in the quite different concepts of purification and impurity. In part because of this difference, there aren't as many specific moral laws that people can violate in Japanese religious traditions as in the religions of the West.

Although both Japanese and Westerners engage in religious observances and rituals, in Japan there is a great variety of religious practice, much of which occurs in places other than temples or shrines. While Japanese don't place as much emphasis on specific doctrines as Westerners, most of them participate in a number of different religious observances throughout the year.

According to recent surveys, at least 60 percent of the families polled keep both a small Buddhist altar and a Shinto shrine in their homes. The Buddhist altar is in large part related to the Japanese practice of ancestor worship, whose roots may be found in Buddhism, Confucianism, and folk religions. Japanese place special decorations for ancestors on the family altar: it is believed that on New Year's and during the Buddhist Festival of the Dead, ancestral spirits return to visit families.¹⁸

The families maintain Shinto shrines in their homes to bring good luck

¹⁸ Linda Wojtan, *Introduction to Japan: A Workbook* (Washington, D.C.: Youth for Understanding, 1986), p. 50.

and to help purify the home. The Japanese custom of removing shoes at the entrance of homes is rooted in part in the Shinto belief that the home should be kept pure from outside defilement.

Festivals that occur both in Shinto and Buddhist shrines and temples and in the streets of cities and villages are very much part of Japanese religious practice. During New Year's millions of Japanese visit shrines and temples, both to purify themselves in order to have a good beginning for the year, and for good luck. The July 13-16 Festival of the Dead is an event in which more Japanese travel than in any other period of the year as many urban dwellers return to their old family villages to take part in festivities and to honor ancestors. Although Japanese festivals have strong religious strands, in general they are times when people go to parties, sing, dance, and participate in parades. Japanese attitudes toward religion are generally much less solemn than those of Westerners.

In the Japanese workplace, religious symbols and even practices are quite common. The fox deity, Inari, is considered the god of cultivation and of business, and most businesses have a small Inari shrine somewhere on the premises. Large department stores often place Inari shrines on the roof.¹⁹

Large Japanese companies such as Toyota and Hitachi often support specific shrines that either were favored by the founder of the company or are considered the homes of certain kami who have special power over the work done in a particular company. Some Japanese companies even send their managers to Zen Buddhist monasteries to learn meditation techniques designed to assist one to clear the mind so as to concentrate on the work at hand.

In Japan religious influences can be found in the arts and even in recreational activities. As you might remember from your earlier reading, Zen Buddhism in particular was very influential in shaping Japanese arts. Today traditional practices such as brush painting, landscape gardening, flower arranging, and Noh theater, all of which accentuate the beauty of simplicity, originated as applications of Zen values. Recreationally, nature-oriented activities, which derive from Shinto and to a lesser extent Zen Buddhism, have been so important in Japanese life that there are special words in the language for the acts of moon and flower viewing.²⁰ Temples and shrines are quite popular sight-seeing sites for Japanese tourists, and several famous ones such as Soji Temple in Tokyo have an almost festive atmosphere.

In addition to traditional religions, Christianity and the so-called "new religions" are part of the Japanese religious landscape. Although

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁰ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, p. 151.



Each year millions of Japanese visit religious sites such as the temple in the Horyuji complex where this statue of the Buddha of Boundless Light, Amida, is housed. This particular icon was created in 1232 A.D. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

today only 1.5 million people, or less than one percent of the population, are Christian, the religion's influence is far greater in Japan than these scarce numbers might indicate. Many Christians tend to be extremely well educated and in leadership positions in business and government. Also there are a number of excellent private Christian secondary schools and universities in Japan today that date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Japanese who are members of the "new religions" constitute a much larger segment of the population than followers of Christianity. Actually, several of the "new religions" are over a century old, but since World War II, membership has mushroomed and now includes 10 to 15 percent of the Japanese population.²¹ Most of these religions are loosely affiliated with Shinto or Buddhism but there are elements in each sect that make them quite different from traditional Japanese religion.

All of the new religious movements have charismatic leaders, many of whom behave in similar fashion to fundamentalist Christian ministers in the United States. The new religions also promise happiness on earth and deliverance from suffering if members faithfully subscribe to the creeds. Other characteristics of the new religions include lavish headquarters and mass meetings attended by thousands. The overwhelming majority of followers of the new religions are lower-middle-class or poor people, many of whom spent their youth in a rural area and moved to the city for economic reasons. The new religions provide such people with a family-like environment. Although there are numerous new religious sects, the Soka Gakkai, which means "value creation society," is the largest group, with approximately 6 million members. Soka Gakkai is a lay association of a 700-year-old Buddhist Nichiren sect. Its leaders teach that Nichiren should be honored more than Buddha and that all other religions are in error except for Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai is quite controversial because of the latter teaching and also because it, like a number of other new religions, is highly evangelical. Neither exclusivity nor evangelism is common in Japanese religious tradition.²²

On the whole, the social institution of religion plays a positive role in Japanese life and culture, providing people with a common set of customs and traditions. In spite of the great religious diversity in Japan, there has been peaceful coexistence among various religious groups, with some major exceptions such as the persecution of Christians during the Tokugawa years. Few people can be as proud of their record of religious

²¹ Anzai, *Japan* 1989, p. 92.

²² Description of Soka Gakkai from H. Neil McFarland, *The Rush Hour of the Gods: A Study of New Religious Movements in Japan* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), pp. 194-220.

tolerance as the Japanese. Religion, like government and education, has changed with the times yet continues to meet Japanese needs.²³

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Diet
- Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)
- Parliamentary system
- Ministry of Education
- Juku Schools
- Soka Gakkai

Review Questions

1. In two or three sentences contrast the election system for the Japanese Diet with the election system for the U.S. Congress.
2. In a short paragraph describe the role of the Japanese national government bureaucracy in the lawmaking process.
3. In two or three sentences explain the following generalization about American and Japanese education: The Japanese educational system is centralized while the American educational system is decentralized.
4. Describe in your own words in a short paragraph examples of contemporary Japanese religious practice in the home and workplace.

Essay Question

1. Study this chapter and identify what you consider to be the most major differences between American and Japanese institutions of government, education, and religion. Write a two- or three-page essay in which you describe the differences between the two countries' institutions and explain why you consider the differences you selected to be important enough to be labeled "major."

In-Depth Learning

1. Currently Japanese education is receiving a great deal of attention in the United States. Several members of your class might wish to explore this topic further by engaging in a number of activities.

²³ Much of the description of contemporary religious practice drawn from H. Byron Earhart, *Religions of Japan* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 142.

If there are Japanese in your school, community, or neighborhood, you might wish to interview them about Japanese education and the differences between American and Japanese elementary and secondary schools. Also, increasing numbers of American educators are visiting Japan through special public and privately sponsored programs and there might be teachers in your own school or community who have visited Japanese schools. One interesting format for the interviews is a simulated press conference. Members of the class could prepare a set of interview questions on Japanese schools with the goal of writing a news story on some aspect of the topic. Invite a panel of outside resource people to the class, pose a series of questions in a press conference format, and then write individual stories for possible publication in the local or school newspaper.

Another possibility is to conduct a class debate on the desirability of American schools implementing such Japanese practices as a national curriculum, increased national funding for education, a longer school year, and examinations to enter high school. You can easily find periodical articles on Japanese schools in the library by consulting *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. Also there are several good books available in English on Japanese education including Benjamin Duke's, *The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), and Thomas Rohlen's *Japan's High Schools* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

FURTHER READING

In addition to the books on education listed above, there are several excellent and relatively easy-to-read paperbacks available on Japanese politics and religion. *The Japanese Diet and the U.S. Congress*, Francis R. Valeo, Charles E. Morrison, eds. (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1983), is a clearly written and interesting comparison. H. Byron Earhart's, *Religions of Japan* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), while only 142 pages, is a sensitive description of the uniqueness of Japanese religion.

C H A P T E R



S E V E N

**THE
JAPANESE
PEOPLE**

INTRODUCTION

One of the really exciting aspects of living in a foreign country, especially one with such a good train system, is travel. Last weekend you boarded the bullet train in Tokyo and less than four hours later arrived in Kyoto, the former imperial capital of Japan. The three days you spent in this lovely city were quite enchanting. The exotic temples and shrines, the beautiful high hills surrounding the city, and bustling, colorful nighttime Kyoto were quite fascinating.

What really interested you most, however, in Kyoto and the rest of Japan, were the people. As you learn more about the Japanese, you find that even more questions arise. One of the most astounding sights during the weekend were the groups of Japanese you met at various famous temples such as Kinkakuji and Ryoanji. At every famous place you visited, lines of buses were parked on the perimeter. Groups of Japanese would get out of a bus and, as a group, visit the temple or shrine, and then get back on the bus together and leave. You were certain these groups were simply tourists but you wonder why so many traveled together.

You also saw large groups of mostly junior high age girls and boys in school uniforms at almost every famous place you visited. There were a few teachers with the students but on the whole, despite a large amount of chatter from time to time, the student groups were extremely well behaved. Although you know Japanese students are supposedly well behaved, you can't believe that in an unstructured situation such as a class outing there weren't more high jinks. Why was this so?

Not all the Japanese tourists you saw were in large groups. On one day of the week, Sunday, there were a number of young couples, usually a father and mother, alone with one or two children, strolling among the temples and gift shops. Since you haven't spent any time in a Japanese home, seeing these parents and children has stimulated your interest in Japanese families in general. You know that many Japanese men have a reputation for hard work. What about housewives and children in Japan? What are their lives like?

Sadly, your time in Japan is growing short and you still yearn to know more about the Japanese as people. How are they different from Americans in their personal lives? What do they really most enjoy doing? Since you definitely plan to return to Japan in the future, you have decided to begin serious study of the Japanese language. It troubles you, however, that recently you read an article by a Japanese in an English-language publication that strongly insinuated that no foreigner could really master Japanese. Reading this made you curious about unraveling some of the mysteries of the Japanese language. You've learned about Japan's geogra-

phy, history, economy, and institutions. It's now time to get to know the Japanese people on more intimate terms.

THE GROUP AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN JAPAN

Learning about families and the status of women, how ordinary people in Japan act toward each other in school and the workplace, about recreation, and about the language is much easier if we begin with some basic generalizations.

The most important is that Japan is, without doubt, one of the most group-oriented societies on earth. In the words of Harvard Professor and famous Japanologist Edwin Reischauer, "Certainly no difference is more significant between Japanese and Americans, or Westerners in general, than the greater Japanese tendency to emphasize the group, somewhat at the expense of the individual."¹

Japanese do not view the American myth of the Lone Ranger as positive. More often than not the Japanese hero is the good team player who subordinates his or her desires to group interests.

Even though the group exerts more influence on Japanese than is true in other societies, Japan is a free society and individuals are at liberty to ignore or defy group norms. Still, such occurrences are rare in Japan compared with the United States. Group loyalty is taught early and reinforced in almost every aspect of Japanese life.

If you'll consider what you've already learned about Japan in this book, the reasons for the famed Japanese devotion to the group become more apparent. Japan for much of its history was relatively isolated from the rest of the world and people learned to live together peacefully while being spared the traumas of outside invasion or war. Wet paddy rice cultivation, one of the earliest and most vital economic activities engaged in by the Japanese, demanded group cooperation. Also, since Japan is a homogeneous society with little ethnic diversity, it was much easier for group cooperation to be nurtured than in many other countries. Geographically, Japan is a relatively hazardous place and the earthquakes, typhoons, and fires forced people to work together to survive.

In addition to history and geography, several of Japan's most influential religious and philosophical systems celebrate group spirit and harmony. Whereas Christianity teaches that every person has a separate soul from the rest of the universe, a fundamental tenet of Buddhism is that all animate and even inanimate beings are one. Confucianism, and later

¹ Edwin Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 127.

Bushido, the way of the samurai, both emphasized such values as loyalty and responsibility to others.

As a result, Japan is not only a society in which many different kinds of groups often fiercely compete with each other, but one in which groups, regardless of whether they are school classes, companies, tea ceremony clubs, or even the underworld, demand and receive great loyalty from members. Japanese are not only loyal to particular groups to which they belong, but within the typical group a clear hierarchy exists with different members having different amounts of status. Also, at times, many Japanese tend to be distant, and often downright unfriendly, to people who are not members of their group.

With the passage of time, however, the roles of certain groups and the members within them have changed considerably. Since World War II this has certainly been true of families.

FAMILIES AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Before we examine Japanese families in detail, meet two real-life Japanese families, the Suzukis and the Satos. The lifestyles of the Suzukis and the Satos illustrate both traditional and changing aspects of Japanese families.

The Suzukis live in Yokohama, Japan's second largest city. The Suzuki family includes Mr. Suzuki, a 40-year-old architect; his wife, Kimi, who is 39; and Yoko, their 10-year-old daughter. The family lives in a three-bedroom condominium which they own. Mr. Suzuki has worked for the same firm for seventeen years. Like most Japanese, he works long hours and many Saturdays. During the week Mr. Suzuki is too tired to help in house cleaning or cooking, but he does help clean the house on Sundays.

Mrs. Suzuki does not work outside the home but is very busy. In addition to preparing meals, cleaning house, and assisting Yoko with studies, Kimi earns extra income twice a week by giving English lessons to junior high students in her home. Mr. and Mrs. Suzuki demonstrate no outward signs of affection toward each other, and their marriage was an arranged one. However, they appear quite contented.

The ages and lifestyle of the Satos are different from those of the Suzukis. Yasuo and his wife Manami are a young couple who live in a small apartment. Both are junior high school English teachers in Yamagata Prefecture, north of Tokyo. The Satos have a two-year-old son, Yoichiro. In order that both Yasuo and Manami can work, Manami's mother, who lives close by, takes care of Yoichiro. Yoichiro's grandmother also does the family laundry and takes care of some of the daily shopping. She occasionally prepares the evening meal, since both Yasuo and Manami are not done with school-related duties until the evening.



Many Japanese families now have "Western" rooms in their homes, and rooms such as the one pictured here, which traditionally have straw tatami mats and futons for sleeping. Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Beattie.

Yasuo appears to take some of the responsibility for caring for Yoichiro. Recently when the Satos were showing a visiting American educator a local temple, Yasuo cared for his son during the day and, later in the evening, bathed with the child. However, Yasuo's wife and mother-in-law seemed to be responsible for such chores as diaper changing and putting Yoichiro to bed.²

Although the American teachers who collected the information on these two Japanese families did not spend enough time with each to gain a great amount of information, the two case studies are interesting beginning points from which to compare and contrast the contemporary Japanese family with Japanese families in earlier times.

When Japan was primarily a rural nation, a period that lasted well into the mid-twentieth century, the extended family was the norm. In traditional Japanese families several generations lived under one roof, wives were clearly subservient to husbands and mothers-in-law, and the large majority of marriages were arranged. It was also quite common for families to have more than two children. In traditional Japan husband and wife as well as older relatives, children, and siblings usually worked together as farmers or proprietors of small enterprises. When a younger son or a daughter in one family married, often he or she moved away, joined another family, and were no longer considered members of their original family. Similarly, in a family with only daughters, when the oldest married her husband would often become part of her family and many times even adopt his wife's family name.

As Japan has urbanized and industrialized, family structure has become similar in many ways to the United States or Western Europe. Today, as in the West, less than 10 percent of adult Japanese families live on farms. Although a larger percentage of retired parents than in the United States still live with or, as in the Satos' case, near their children, the nuclear family is becoming the norm. Japanese families now statistically average fewer than two children.

Even though the couples you read about sounded in many respects like typical Americans, several aspects of Japanese family life are still quite different than in this country. One example is the Suzuki arranged marriage, a practice that is still common. Many Japanese view survival of the family line, and not romance, as the major reason two people should get married. Although increasing numbers of Japanese report they marry because of love, approximately 40 percent of all marriages are still arranged by the respective families. Understand, though, that today if a

² Case studies taken from Lynn Parisi, ed., *A Look at Japanese Culture Through the Family: A Case Study Activity* (Boulder, Col.: Social Science Education Consortium, 1988), pp. 15-16, 83-84.

young man and woman are introduced by a go-between and don't like each other, they are under no obligation to marry.³

Although an increasing number of Japanese wives, like Mrs. Sato, have outside jobs, the majority of married women with children still stay at home. Even though Japanese divorce rates are still less than a quarter of divorce rates in the United States, it is quite typical for Japanese husbands, like Mr. Suzuki, to spend less time at home than Americans or Europeans. One recent government survey revealed that only 41 percent of salarimen ate dinner at home every night and fully a third spent less than three waking hours a day with their families. Many Japanese males, particularly middle-class professionals, often behave as if the workplace group is more important than the family.

Since Japanese husbands are seldom at home, wives have broad decision-making powers regarding family matters. You learned earlier that usually Japanese women take complete responsibility for monitoring children's education. Also Japanese wives usually control finances. It is still not uncommon for Japanese husbands to turn their salaries over to their wives and in turn receive an allowance.

While women in most cultures play the leading role in childrearing, the bond between mother and child in Japan is particularly strong. Mothers sleep with their young for a longer period of time after the child is born than in the West and in general give young children more attention than do Western mothers. The result is that Japanese children develop a stronger sense of dependence on their mothers than children in other cultures.

Young children are treated quite leniently in Japan and are rarely spanked when they misbehave. Instead the Japanese mother is more likely to forgive the child and make the child feel guilty for not conforming to her wishes. Many sociologists argue that this early development of a sense of shame when one fails to conform to others' expectations helps to create the feeling shared by many adult Japanese of not wanting to let other group members down.⁵

Many Japanese women, whether married or not, live a quite different life in many respects than their Western counterparts, particularly in the workplace. Even though almost half of the Japanese women now work, opportunities for good jobs are quite limited for women. In the United States males still hold the majority of professional jobs, and in Japan professional work is even more male dominated. In a recent government

³ Robert Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), pp. 61-76.

⁴ Kittridge Cherry, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say About Women* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987), p. 136.

⁵ Reischauer, *The Japanese*, pp. 140-41.



Although traditionally many Japanese women have been denied access to managerial positions in business, government, and education, there are signs the situation is changing. The woman speaking is a vice-principal of a large Osaka-area junior high school. Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Beattie.

survey of 5,000 companies, only 22 percent offered positions to women university graduates.⁶

Many working females are typically young unmarried women for whom the Japanese have a nickname which may be translated as OLS or "office flowers." These young women work for a corporation for five to six years after they graduate from high school or junior college and, upon marrying, leave the company. "Office flowers" are never given meaningful work but instead are expected to create a pleasant environment for the permanent, mostly male employees by making and serving tea and running errands.⁷

Not all women fit the work pattern just described. Since now approximately one-third of all women who finish high school go on to receive college degrees, more and more women, like Mrs. Sato, are pursuing professional careers.⁸ Still, in a society where it is very difficult for an outsider to be accepted by the group, women are far too often considered not eligible for membership in the Japanese workplace solely because of their gender.

LEARNING GROUP SKILLS: THE SCHOOL

To understand the Japanese people, and particularly their strong group orientation, it is important to look again at schools. In addition to being places where subject matter knowledge is taught, schools also serve the extremely important function of teaching Japanese to be good group members.

The process begins in Japanese kindergartens, where, unlike in the United States, more emphasis is placed upon getting along with others than on academics. When a child enters first grade, his or her unofficial course in group loyalty continues. Students usually remain together as a class with the same teacher through the first and second grades. Classes, or *kumis*, as the Japanese call them, constantly learn, play, and even eat together for two years, and children typically develop a strong attachment to the kumi. Japanese teachers work hard to foster this attachment by focusing their attention on the kumi as a whole at the expense of individualized instruction.

Most Japanese elementary schools do not have cafeterias, and kumis eat together in the classroom along with the teacher. Within the kumi

⁶ Linda Wojtan, *Introduction to Japan: A Workbook* (Washington, D.C.: Youth for Understanding, 1986), p. 57.

⁷ Cherry, *Womansword*, pp. 105-6.

⁸ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, p. 109.



This group of Japanese students is having lunch together during a class outing. Japanese educators believe that learning good group skills is as important as academics. Photo courtesy of Linda Hooper.

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smaller groups of students called *hans* are responsible on a rotating basis for bringing the food to and from the Japanese kitchen to the classroom. The *hans* also take turns cleaning the classrooms.

Each *kumi* and *han* in elementary and junior high school elects leaders who assist the larger classroom group and the smaller groups within it to operate effectively. Teachers give classroom assignments to *hans*, and group loyalty grows as children work together to complete tasks. Almost all Japanese sixth and ninth graders take field trips lasting several days to important cultural and historical sites. Children are often assigned bus or train seats on the basis of the particular *kumis* and *hans* to which they belong, and teachers check attendance by consulting the *kumi* and *han* leaders. In general, *kumis* and *hans* are used by educators throughout elementary and junior high school to foster a sense of group responsibility.

In junior and senior high extracurricular activities play a major role in teaching young Japanese the value of group loyalty. When a Japanese student joins a club, whether it be a tennis, flower-arranging, or dramatics group, he or she is expected to exhibit complete group commitment. This means the individual not only will engage in the utmost effort to make his or her club successful, but will also show the appropriate amount of respect to club members, usually older students, who have higher status. For example, it is quite common in high school baseball practice for sophomores to play very little, regardless of their abilities. Instead younger team members spend most of their time retrieving bats and balls and keeping the playing field in good shape for the juniors and seniors. Those who later attend university and join clubs encounter this same expectation of total group loyalty and respect for senior members.

By the time a Japanese reaches adulthood, his or her early home and school experiences usually ensure that the individual will be a team player in the next stage of life, the workplace.⁹

THE WORKPLACE GROUP

A few years ago when the giant American auto maker, Chrysler, was facing bankruptcy, one of the events that saved the company was that the board of directors replaced top management with executives who were lured away from Ford Motor Company. A very successful Japanese businessman, in a conversation with an American journalist about the events at Chrysler, made the following comment about Japan: "In this country you just don't get a company like Chrysler calling in a top Ford executive to run

⁹ Description of reinforcement of group values in school taken from Benjamin Duke, *The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 25-49.

its affairs. That would be almost as unthinkable as it would for New Yorkers to elect a mayor that lived all his life in Chicago." This revealing statement is only one of many illustrations of how the loyalty and team play Japanese learn early on in life often affect their feelings about the workplace group.¹⁰

Today for many Japanese the workplace has replaced the traditional extended family of earlier times as the primary group. In many companies and government ministries, as employees enter the organization they are treated as much like new family members as workers. Companies often conduct emotional induction ceremonies for these workers, with top executives making motivational speeches about the lifetime commitments that the company, new workers, and colleagues now have to each other. Some companies even have special training programs for new workers that focus exclusively on building loyalty.¹¹

In Japan many employees put in long hours on the job together, socialize after work with each other, play on company teams, and live side by side in company housing. It is even common for a work associate, particularly an eligible bachelor's superior, to match-make an employee by introducing him to single women. Also it is routine for company members and their families to go on company-sponsored vacations together. In fact it is very unusual for many Japanese to have any other friends to speak of other than work mates. All this makes it almost impossible for many Japanese to separate work from private life.¹²

Decision making in the workplace strongly reflects the group orientation of the Japanese. In addition to the quality control circles that fit so well with the Japanese group participation model, a group process called *nemawashi* is quite common. *Nemawashi*, or "root binding," is a concept taken from the gardening procedures used by growers of miniature bonsai trees: as the trees are repotted, roots are carefully pruned and positioned to determine future shape. Many times before a decision is made in a Japanese company, leaders will carefully check with many people who could be affected by the decision, starting with the junior employees. If too many employees have objections, leaders might drop an idea altogether or modify a proposed decision. Even if top management makes a decision contrary to subordinates' wishes, it is considered important that prior consultation has occurred. Although the *nemawashi* process frustrates Westerners because it is time consuming, once it is completed a Japanese company or public agency often moves very quickly to implement a partic-

¹⁰ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, p. 246.

¹¹ Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 1-21.

¹² *Ibid.*



The Japanese office reflects the group orientation of the culture. Usually, as in this photo, individual offices are the exception and Japanese office workers are side by side in one large room. Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Beattie.

ular decision, in part because a consensus is built and everyone to a certain extent is "on board."¹³

In the Japanese workplace as elsewhere, all individual employees enjoy different levels of status. Usually personal workplace status is based upon educational level attained, what particular university a person attended, and when he (or possibly she) entered the organization. Except for people who have equal educational status and entered the company at the same time, most Japanese have very few equals on the job. One's associates usually have higher or lower status.

Even if a person is better at a job than an associate who happens to have been with the company longer, the former, because of his lower status, is expected to be deferential to the senior worker. Hierarchy and status are important not only within, but also between, Japanese groups. It is common for many Japanese, when meeting strangers, to immediately exchange cards containing the person's name, company, and title. These card exchanges help Japanese know a stranger's status so that they can react accordingly.

Groups in any society, especially in large organizations such as companies or government ministries, require leaders. However, the strong influence of the group in Japan often causes high-ranking officials or managers to exhibit quite different behaviors toward their subordinates than is true in more individualistic cultures such as the United States. Workplace leaders, like Japanese politicians, are expected to keep a relatively low profile and certainly not be autocratic.

Often Japanese attain leadership positions in an organization not because they are dynamic or flamboyant—in fact these are viewed as negative personality traits—but because they are good listeners and consensus builders. Top Japanese executives are expected to be the first to sacrifice when hard times arrive. For example, Japanese management takes pay cuts when companies do badly, and sometimes seniors even resign for a subordinate's misdeed, if it is considered serious enough.

As you know, the Japanese, whether in leadership or subordinate roles, are famous the world over for their great ability to work well together. This cultural trait is perhaps the most positive influence of their lifelong strong group loyalties.

RECREATION AND THE GROUP

The groups of sightseers our American friend noticed at famous places in Kyoto are quite common throughout Japan and, as more Japanese engage in international travel, in other parts of the world as well. It is normal in

¹³ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, pp. 53–54.

Japan for club, school, or work groups to travel together, and most Japanese feel miserable and insecure if forced to travel by themselves. Just as the group is important in school and work, it also plays a vital role in travel and other leisure activities. Although people have individual interests—two solitary pursuits, reading and television, are quite popular—Japanese show a strong tendency toward group forms of recreation.

Adult clubs play a large role in the lives of typical Japanese, and the range of these clubs varies tremendously. Large percentages of Japanese, perhaps because of high average educational levels, take part in cultural-related organizations such as foreign language (especially English), literature, and poetry clubs. Because of their religious heritage, Japanese show a particular affinity for nature that is strongly reflected in the numerous flower-arranging clubs, various festivals, and special times of the year that focus upon nature, such as cherry blossom viewing in the spring. Japanese often participate in festivals and nature-related events, as members of club, school, or work groups.

The Japanese are in general especially keen on sports, both traditional and Western, and there are organized karate, kendo, archery, soccer, tennis, and golf groups throughout the country. Even an individualistic sport such as long-distance running is likely to be engaged in by groups in Japan.

Spectator sports, particularly sumo wrestling and baseball, are also extremely popular. Sumo, which is almost two thousand years old, is a duel between two gigantic, scantily clad men in which the first one who touches the ground with any part of the body or is forced out of the ring loses. Every year there are six major tournaments, each lasting fifteen days. Sumo tournaments are attended by thousands of people and watched by millions on national television.

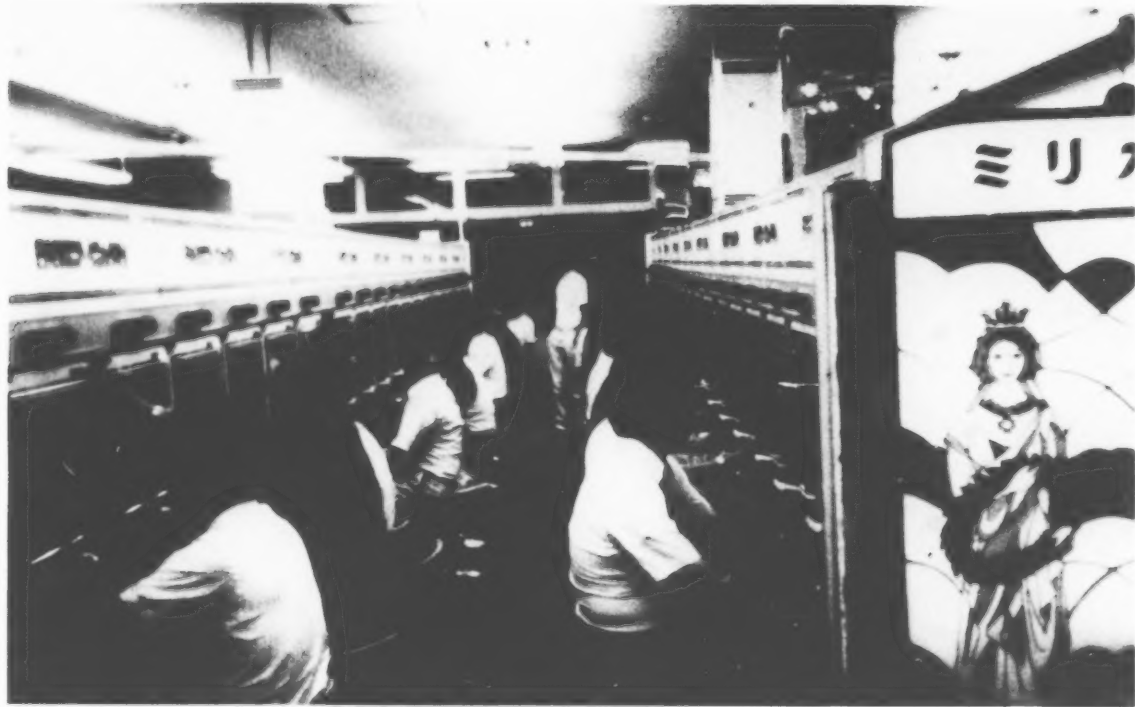
Baseball, which was introduced by an American teacher in 1872, is now the most popular spectator sport in Japan. Every spring the national high school play-offs held in Koshien Stadium near Osaka are broadcast on television and followed by millions of people. Japan has two professional major leagues as well as minor league teams, and a World Series occurs each fall. Although the game is played essentially the same way in Japan and the United States, one need only watch Japanese baseball on television or attend a game to see visible evidence of the group orientation in the culture. Fans of respective teams, compared with their American counterparts, engage in extremely well-organized cheers!

Fads and fashions are often a humorous form of recreation in any culture but Japanese, perhaps because of group pressure and cultural homogeneity, seem to be particularly susceptible to them. Golf is now quite popular and qualifies as a fad as much as a sport. One recent survey revealed that over 80 percent of Japanese office workers in their 40s owned



These men are engaging in kendo, a vigorous traditional martial art that is very common in Japan and is taught in Japanese schools. Kendo is a form of fencing in which participants utilize bamboo swords. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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Pachinko, a form of pinball, is very popular all over Japan. Pachinko parlors are neon lit and very, very noisy. Photograph taken by author.

a set of golf clubs! In recent years the celebration of Christmas, most specifically Santa Claus and seasonal gift giving, has become quite the thing in Japan, a rather unusual phenomenon since the nation is not predominately Christian. There are even signs now that Halloween, which was introduced only in the last few years, is becoming quite a popular event!¹⁴

Fads, sports, schooling, and work are all activities that can reveal much to the careful observer about the values large numbers of people in a society consider important. The same is no less true of the language a people speak and write. In order for you to better understand the Japanese people, an examination of the Japanese language is important.

THE LANGUAGE

The Japanese language, the tenth most frequently spoken in the world, is unique and has no close relationship to any other language, such as English does to German, or French does to Spanish. Spoken Japanese, because of a fairly simple phonetic system and grammatical rules, is not so difficult to master, but written Japanese is another case entirely.

Many linguists believe that Japanese is the world's most difficult written language. Today written Japanese consists of three types of characters: kanji, hiragana, and katakana.¹⁵ *Kanji*, which means "Chinese characters," are ideograms, or pictorial representations of ideas. Kanji were imported into Japan sometime during the fourth century A.D. from China via Korea. Although there are said to be some 48,000 kanji in existence, roughly 4,000 characters are commonly used. The Ministry of Education has identified 1,850 kanji as essential for everyday life, and these are taught to all students in elementary and secondary school. Kanji are used in writing the main parts of a sentence such as verbs and nouns, as well as names. Kanji are the most difficult written Japanese characters, requiring as many as 23 separate strokes.

Since spoken Japanese was in existence long before kanji reached Japan, the Japanese adopted the Chinese ideograms to represent spoken Japanese words of the same or related meanings. Since the sounds of Japanese words signifying the ideas were not the same as the sounds of the

¹⁴ Information about recreation in Japan taken from Howard and Irma Newmark, eds., *Nippon: Talking about Japan* (Tokyo: ALC Press, 1987), pp. 187-99, and *Facts about Japan: Sports* (Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1986), pp. 1-4.

¹⁵ There is also a writing system called Romanization or Romaji, in which Japanese is translated into the Roman alphabet for the purpose of teaching Westerners conversational Japanese. Romaji is also used in many street signs and subway stations in Japan to assist Westerners.

花 河 真

KANJI. Originally from China and used for main parts of sentences such as nouns and verbs and for Japanese names. Each character represents one word. For example, the second character in the row here means "river."

イ シ レ

KATAKANA. Used for writing words in Japanese that came from other languages. Each katakana character represents a phonetic syllable. For example, the second character in the row here represents the phonetic syllable "tsu."

め う っ

HIRAGANA. Used for writing verb endings, adverbs, conjunctions, and various particles. Each character represents one phonetic syllable. For example, the second character in the row here represents the phonetic syllable "u." Calligraphy by Aya Setoguchi.

Chinese words, it became important to develop a writing system for representing the Japanese sound. Therefore the Japanese developed two sets of characters, *hiragana* and *katakana*, from original Chinese characters. Each *kana*, as these two systems are called, is a separate phonetic syllabary and each hiragana character has a corresponding katakana character. Hiragana and katakana characters are similar to English letters in that each character represents a separate phonetic sound.

Hiragana are used in writing verb endings, adverbs, conjunctions, and various sentence particles and are written in a cursive, smooth style. Katakana, which are used mainly in writing foreign words, are written in a more angular, stiff style. Both hiragana and katakana are easy to write compared with kanji. Each hiragana and katakana character takes between one and four strokes.

In modern written Japanese, kanji, hiragana, and katakana are combined. Traditionally, Japanese is written vertically and read from top to bottom and right to left, although now most business writing is done horizontally because it is easier to include numerals and English words. Even though the written language is in many ways illogical, it has aesthetic appeal and contributes to a feeling on the part of many Japanese that they are unique among the world's peoples.¹⁶

The Japanese, in some ways, take a different view than Americans of the purpose of spoken language. In the United States and other Western countries the ability to communicate ideas clearly is considered a desirable trait in an individual. Often this is not true with the Japanese. Japanese believe that group members should know each other quite well and if one member speaks too directly he or she might offend other group members. Therefore, to preserve group harmony it is often important that a person speak indirectly. For example, if a Japanese finds a request by an associate impossible to fulfill, he or she often uses a phrase that could be translated into English as "it's very difficult." Most Japanese would consider an out and out "no" far too direct!¹⁷

In order to understand how much cultural values such as respect for hierarchy are reflected in language, consider the personal referent, or the words for "I." First of all it is quite common for Japanese not to use a personal referent in a sentence when the meaning is clear to the listener. For example, where an English language speaker might tell a listener, "I

¹⁶ Description of written Japanese taken from Yasuo Yoshida, ed., *Japanese for Today* (Tokyo: Gakken Co., 1973), pp. 1-9, and L. Armorer Bester, ed., *Understanding Japan 49: A Teachers' and Textbook Writers' Handbook on Japan* (Tokyo: The International Society for Educational Information, Inc., 1985), p. 47.

¹⁷ Robert Ozaki, *The Japanese: A Cultural Portrait* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, Inc., 1978), pp. 227-30.

am going to lunch," the equivalent Japanese sentence translated into English could very likely be "going to lunch." This is so because Japanese consider it impolite to call too much attention to themselves, a use of language in part inspired by the cultural value of emphasizing the group rather than the individual.

Hierarchy and status, as was described earlier, play important roles in Japan, which is a major reason there are 26 different words for "I" depending on the respective status of the speaker and listener. *Watashi* is the most common personal referent, and both men and women may use it. However, males usually use *watakushi* or *boku*. *Boku* can be used only by males and most often by boys and young men, although many boys change to *ore* in junior or senior high school. Adult Japanese men, however, might use *boku* in very informal situations when speaking with older people. *Atashi* can be used only by women but is for informal occasions. *Atai*, on the other hand, is used by little girls.¹⁸

The Japanese language has numerous words that people of lower and higher status are expected to employ with superiors and subordinates; not using the appropriate word or phrase in a society that places a high premium on group harmony can certainly cause trouble!

GROUP LIVING: A SUMMARY

The strong orientation of Japanese society toward the group carries many benefits for individual Japanese, including the sense of accomplishment resulting from teamwork, and a great sense of belonging and security. However, the great pressure placed upon the individual by the group in Japan also has a negative side.

Japan is not a society where individuals who dare to be different have fared well. The old Japanese proverb that the nail that protrudes too far is hammered down has often meant difficult times for, among others, many young people and workers who do not fit in with the group.

In part the rigidity of Japanese schools is a direct result of the pressure for conformity. Students who have special learning needs, or who have been abroad and out of the educational system for a time, are often either ignored or treated as if they are outsiders. Although it is a highly debatable issue, Japan has a reputation for not being a particularly creative society. Many Westerners and Japanese contend that the pressure to conform to group norms in Japanese schools inhibits individual creativity. Currently Japanese educators, government officials, and the public are actively

¹⁸ Marilyn Turkovich and Linda Bubolz Ashida, *Omiyage* (Chicago: Associates in Multicultural and International Education, 1986), pp. 100-101.

searching for ways to create a better climate in the schools for individual students who are different.

Despite the successes of Japanese business, the employees do not always benefit from the strong emphasis placed on the group. Companies can lose business opportunities because of the slow decision-making process fostered by a great concern for group consultation. Many times top Japanese managers or government officials might not be the most competent people in a given organization but have attained their position because of a talent for offending the least number of people. For over two decades there has been mounting evidence that many workers, particularly younger Japanese, are seriously questioning the previously largely unchallenged value that an individual should sacrifice his private life for the welfare of the company.

Even Japanese who are accepted in the various groups with which they associate often find the close attention that must be paid to almost every word and gesture in order to not offend others to be a psychological strain. Japanese often report that they much admire the American trait of direct and open use of language, and the freedom people apparently enjoy in the United States to be different without fear of being ostracized.

Finally, in part because of their sense of uniqueness and group solidarity, Japanese historically have not related well to foreigners on a personal level. This difficulty with foreigners has caused individual Japanese who have spent too much time in other countries, or who have interacted too much with foreigners, to be viewed as strange by their fellow citizens. In a world that becomes smaller with each passing day, because of increased communications and economic interactions, if Japan is to remain prosperous it is imperative that the society foster rather than inhibit the desire of some of its members to reach out to other peoples.

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Traditional extended family
- "Office Flowers"
- Nemawashi
- Kanji
- Kana

Review Questions

1. In your own words in a short paragraph explain several differences between traditional extended and contemporary Japanese families.

2. In your own words in a short paragraph describe how Japanese schools teach students to become effective group members.
3. In a short paragraph explain specific ways in which cultural emphasis on the group causes the workplace to be different in Japan than in a society such as the United States where more emphasis is placed upon the individual.
4. In your own words in two or three sentences describe advantages and disadvantages for individual Japanese that could result from the strong emphasis placed upon the group.

Essay Question

1. Whereas in Japanese society the group is considered more important than the individual, often in American society the exact opposite is the case. In a one- to two-page essay discuss aspects of U.S. history, geography, religion, and philosophy that helped to create the great emphasis in this culture upon individualism. In the essay compare and contrast the American with the Japanese experience.

In-Depth Learning

1. The written Japanese language is also utilized as an art form. In both historical times and the present, calligraphy, or the art of handwriting, has been widely practiced. Find some examples of calligraphy in art books at a local library and share them with the rest of the class.
2. The major generalization in this chapter is that Japan is one of the most group-oriented societies in the world. If there are Japanese in your community, city, or school, you might like to interview them regarding this issue. Example questions are listed below. If interviews are possible in your locale, share your findings with the class.
 - Do you agree that Japan in general is a more group-oriented society than the United States? Please explain why you answered as you did.
 - If more emphasis is placed upon the group in Japan than in the United States, what are advantages and disadvantages of this characteristic of Japanese culture?
 - If you do believe that American society is more oriented toward the individual than Japanese society, has this caused you to have to make any adjustments in how you interact with other people while living in the United States? If so, what are examples of the adjustments you've made?
 - There are both Japanese and Westerners who contend that the emphasis placed upon group conformity in Japan's schools is a barrier to the development of creativity in individual students. On the basis of your own experiences and what you know about Japanese schools, would you agree or disagree with this argument? Please explain your answer.
3. Although recreational activities such as baseball and television that originated in the West are popular in Japan, so are more traditional activities such as flower

arranging (ikebana), paper folding (origami), a form of fencing called kendo, the martial arts of judo and karate, and sumo wrestling. You and your classmates might wish to form teams, research one of these activities, and present an oral report to the rest of the class.

FURTHER READING

Both Róbert Christopher's *The Japanese Mind* and Edwin Reischauer's *The Japanese* have excellent sections on the Japanese people. If you are interested in the relationship between the group and the individual in Japan, one of the most widely read books on the topic is Chie Nakane's, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). Kittridge Cherry's, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say About Japanese Women* (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1987) is a fascinating explanation of the relationship between the status of women in Japan and the language. Marjorie Bingham and Susan Hill's *Women in Japan from Ancient Times to the Present* (Glenhurst Publications, St. Louis Park, Minn., 1987) is a more general overview of the historical and contemporary roles and status of Japanese women.

C H A P T E R



E I G H T

**JAPAN
AND
THE
FUTURE**

ONE MAN EXAMINES THE FUTURE

Even though their group orientation has caused the Japanese difficulty with other countries, students of Japan's history and society are impressed with Japan's ability to, in the words of one American journalist, "adapt to radically changed circumstances without sacrificing a distinctive sense of identity."¹

Although adaptability is a valuable commodity anywhere, in an increasingly interdependent future world it is especially precious in Japan, a country with few resources except the collective wits of its people. In order to cope with a new place in the world of the future as well as with problems at home, many Japanese will be called upon to exhibit the high qualities of adaptability epitomized by a man such as Amaya Naohiro.

Amaya Naohiro, the most famous futurist in the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, has spent much of his adult life thinking, writing about, and formulating policies that will affect Japan for years to come. Amaya was born in 1925 and near the end of World War II graduated at the top of his class from prestigious Tokyo University. In working for MITI, Amaya gained the reputation as a one-man think tank. In the late 1960s Amaya correctly predicted future skyrocketing prices of oil and the need for the Japanese economy to shift from energy-intensive industries such as chemicals and steel to high-technology and low-energy-consuming industries such as electronics and computers.

In 1981 the feeling was growing around the world that Japan was profiting economically at other countries' expense through exporting massive amounts of goods while driving foreign industries out of business. As thousands of workers lost their jobs because consumers bought Japanese cars, American auto makers were putting great pressure on the U.S. government for protectionist legislation. If Congress had passed such legislation, it would have drastically reduced the number of Japanese autos sold in this country.

Thanks in large part to Amaya's efforts as Japan's chief negotiator, the Japanese and American governments reached an agreement in 1981 whereby Japanese auto makers would "voluntarily" limit the number of autos they exported to the United States. The negotiations that led to the agreements were very difficult. Amaya was forced not only to satisfy American concerns but also to formulate a plan that was acceptable to Japanese auto manufacturers. Major companies such as Toyota and Nissan were very much against the idea initially, but Amaya convinced industry leaders of the future benefits of compromise.

¹ Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1983), p. 328.

The agreements, which were still in effect in 1989, ensured the Japanese a substantial portion of the American car market and defused pressures on the U.S. Congress to severely limit the availability of Japanese cars in this country.

In the mid-1980s Amaya was again called upon to formulate policy that promised to affect the future of Japan. Then Prime Minister Nakasone selected Amaya to serve on a special commission given the task of making major reform recommendations for Japanese education. Not surprisingly, Amaya, given his sophisticated global perspective, was a strong proponent of a proposal, which the Japanese government later enthusiastically endorsed, to internationalize Japanese schools at all levels. In the commission report and other articles, Amaya also urged that future Japanese schools become more decentralized and that educators place more emphasis on development of student creativity.

Naohiro's personal life is a highly positive example of the kinds of traits that will serve Japan well in the twenty-first century. Ironically, a man who is regarded as Japan's leading futurist has spent much of his life reading and writing about the past. Amaya is an amateur historian who has published works on early modern Venice and early China. Although many of his fellow bureaucrats were somewhat puzzled to see him reading a book on early China on the eve of some important negotiation, the study of world history has given Amaya the perspective to think reflectively about Japan's future.

Americans who met Amaya in the 1950s and followed his career into later decades were also amazed at how Naohiro progressed, through sheer effort, in his understanding and ability to speak English and his knowledge of American culture. In his early career, although considered brilliant by MITI colleagues, Amaya was somewhat suspect because he was quick to voice his opinions and was not, like most Japanese, particularly deferential to seniors. Yet younger MITI employees revered Amaya because they knew that, regardless of an individual's status in the ministry, if one had a good idea Amaya would listen.

Even though Amaya is an unconventional Japanese by some standards, he has often praised more common Japanese traits such as teamwork and effort. If the Japanese meet future challenges successfully, they must retain such characteristic cultural strengths as the strong group spirit and work ethic while learning new ways of individual creativity from people like Amaya Naohiro.²

² Information on Amaya Naohiro taken from David Halberstam, *The Reckoning* (New York: Avon Books, 1986), pp. 17-31.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND JAPAN'S FUTURE

On February 24, 1989, on a cold, rainy day in Tokyo thousands of mourners, including political leaders from 163 nations, attended the funeral service of Emperor Hirohito, marking the end of his 63-year reign. The ceremonies were especially significant since they symbolized the end of the period in Japanese history that included World War II and the economic "miracle." The death of Hirohito and the accession of his son Akihito to the throne was also symbolic of new changes for Japan, particularly in world affairs.

As the twenty-first century approaches, the Japanese find themselves forced into a new role on the world stage. Since the end of World War II the Japanese, for the most part, have kept an extremely low profile in international politics. The 1947 Constitution and the overwhelming sentiment of the Japanese people worked against the reestablishment of strong military forces. In addition, in return for some financial support for American military bases in Japan, the Japanese have enjoyed the protection of U.S. forces.

Freed from preoccupation with defense, Japanese political leaders concentrated on first reconstructing the economy and later catching up to the United States and Western European countries in affluence levels. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the Japanese tried to offend as few nations as possible so as not to endanger possible overseas markets, and they followed the U.S. line on most international questions.

By the early 1980s Japan not only caught, but in some cases economically surpassed, the West. Japan alone is now responsible for one-tenth of world GNP, is one of the three largest economies on earth, and is the world's leading money lender. The rest of the world and many Japanese now realize that because of Japan's massive wealth it can no longer concentrate on building a strong economy and ignore significant international political issues.

Japan is already formulating new relations with the world's poorer countries. Until the late 1980s Japan's foreign aid was rather limited and based primarily on the desire to cultivate future customers for Japanese business. Japan has now become the world's number one foreign aid donor and gives aid, particularly to Asian countries, on the basis of need and not just as a stimulus for future business efforts.

Recently Japan has targeted aid to countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand, which are U.S. allies, so as to assist in stabilizing Southeast Asia, a task left in the past largely to the United States. The Japanese have assumed this new role in reaction to the American government's position that the United States can no longer afford such a high



Japan is very unlikely to develop nuclear weapons in the future. Millions of Japanese remember the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The famous "Atomic Bomb Dome" in Hiroshima is a constant reminder to visitors of the bomb. Photo courtesy of Linda Hooper.

level of commitment in the region and Japan with its new wealth should share the burden.

The Japanese have also, in part because of American pressure, increased their share of the costs for the 60,000 American military personnel stationed in Japan and for military spending in general. By the mid-1980s Japan was seventh in the world in defense expenditures and in January 1987 it abandoned a traditional limit of one percent of GNP for military spending.³

Japan's military spending increases continue to be very controversial at home as well as in other parts of the world, particularly in the Asian countries that were subjected to Japanese aggression in World War II. Although Japan will probably continue to increase spending on its national self-defense forces, the increase will most likely be gradual. Also, because the Japanese were the only people in the world to suffer the effects of atomic bombing, there is a near national consensus that the country should never become a nuclear power.

Japan is quite close to China and the Soviet Union, the two largest communist nations on earth. A long history of cultural ties causes many Japanese to have special feelings toward the Chinese. Despite periodic flare-ups between the two nations, most recently over Japanese high school textbook omission of Japan's aggression in China during World War II, relations have for the most part been cordial since Japan recognized the People's Republic of China in the early 1970s.

Postwar relations between Japan and the Soviet Union have been quite strained, although there are signs of improvement. In the very last days of World War II the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and seized four islands in the southern Kuril chain northeast of Hokkaido. Today the Soviets still occupy this territory, which Japan considers its rightful property. The Kuril Islands issue involves security as well as property, since the islands are close enough to Hokkaido to place this major Japanese island within the range of Soviet artillery. By the late 1980s there were signs that the Soviet government was ready to discuss the possibility of returning the southern Kurils to Japan, but the issue is a major stumbling block in Japanese-Soviet relations.⁴

The question of an appropriate Japanese foreign policy for the twenty-

³ Michael H. Armacost, "The U.S., Japan, and Asian Pacific Security in Perspective," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, May 29, 1987), pp. 1-5, and Yoichi Anzai, ed., *Japan 1989: An International Comparison* (Tokyo: Keizai Koho Center, 1988), p. 85.

⁴ Barbara Wanner, "Tenor of Japanese-Soviet Relations Improves," JET Report No. 118 (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, January 6, 1989), pp. 5-6.

first century, not only with Asia and the superpowers but with Western Europe and the Mideast, is the subject of great debate in Japan. As you know, the Japanese have traditionally felt unique from the rest of the world and not particularly at ease with foreigners. Since the low-profile policies of the last few decades allowed Japan to limit its relations with foreigners, many Japanese would like to see future foreign policy also based primarily on commercial relations. However, Japan's new world importance makes a continuation of such past policy impossible.

Recently there has also been international reaction to Japan's strong emphasis on exports. Much of the rest of the world, because of large trade deficits with Japan, was by the 1980s putting great pressure on the Japanese to make significant changes in order to make their economy less export driven and more dependent upon domestic demand. Foreigners and some Japanese argue that if the Japanese save less and spend more money, demand for both Japanese and foreign goods will increase, thereby helping foreign countries improve their trade deficits with Japan.

In 1986 in an attempt to reduce economic friction between Japan and other nations, a special advisory committee to the prime minister issued a report that called for major economic change. Many of the recommendations were very close to what Western countries had advocated.

The Maekawa Report, named for the committee chair and former Bank of Japan governor Maekawa Haruo, included the assertion that Japan had to bring foreign imports more into balance with exports or risk very negative worldwide repercussions. Maekawa and his colleagues also recommended the expansion of domestic demand through encouraging Japanese to consume more (particularly foreign manufactured goods) and work and save less.⁵

The report is highly controversial in Japan. Many members of the older generation who rebuilt Japan after World War II believe strongly that hard work and savings are what made Japan great and it is sheer folly to change such worthy habits. Other Japanese feel that to concentrate too much on exports in the future could result in foreign countries barring Japanese goods and eventually could severely damage Japan's economy.

Although by the beginning of the 1990s Japanese trade surpluses were still large, both domestic consumption levels and foreign manufactured imports were rising, an encouraging sign for future world economic harmony.

⁵ Jon K. T. Choy, ed., *Japan: Exploring New Paths* (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, 1988), pp. 9-13.

LIFE IN JAPAN: THE FUTURE

Foreign relations are not the only problems Japan faces as it attempts to meet the challenges of an uncertain future. At home there are unresolved problems such as overall quality of life, new threats to human relations at the workplace, and special needs of the older and younger generations. Despite great wealth, life in Japan still leaves much to be desired and the ensuing years will undoubtedly bring efforts on a national level to address such major quality-of-life related problems as living and work space and food prices.

Although to a certain extent the space problem is an insoluble one, Japanese ingenuity is even now at work in attempts to make as much use as possible out of this scarce resource. One highly unusual idea supported by several major corporations evokes images of the Biblical story of Noah. The Noah Project, whose backers included Nippon Steel Company, the world's largest steel manufacturer, is a plan by B. B. Consultants, a small Japanese firm, to build a 35,000-ton ark in Tokyo Bay to ease the space problem. The floating apparatus would accommodate 700 workers and hold offices, a hotel, shops, boutiques, sports clubs, and large mainframe computers. Workers would commute each day to the ark by helicopter and water bus.

Also, with the backing of 30 major corporations, the Japanese government has established a foundation entitled Ocean City which is formulating plans to build a floating city in Tokyo Bay in the twenty-first century. The city will be built on a quadruple-deck platform twice the size of present-day central Tokyo. Ocean City would cost \$200 billion, house a million residents, and feature golf courses, two baseball stadiums, and an airport. The same foundation has announced that it plans to build a smaller floating city elsewhere in Japan during the 1990s.⁶

The ark and the floating city ideas are attempts to ease the space problem in Tokyo, where it is most acute, but cramped and expensive housing is a problem throughout Japan. Although Japanese, because of lack of space, will always have smaller houses than Americans or Western Europeans, financing, the tax system, and existing space utilization make any home ownership very difficult for urban dwellers and younger Japanese. In Japan the initial down payment for a house is extremely high and, unlike in the United States, the government does not allow individuals to deduct mortgage interest payments from income taxes.⁷

⁶ Stephen K. Yoder, "Like Noah of Old: Japanese Consider Building Some Arks," *Wall Street Journal*, 211, no. 102 (May 18, 1988), 1.

⁷ Edward J. Lincoln, *Japan Facing Economic Maturity* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1988), p. 277.



The Japanese city of the future could be built partially underground. The simple reason for this is the space problem in major cities. One of the most crowded sections of any Japanese city is Tokyo's Ginza district, pictured here. Photo courtesy of Australian Overseas Information Bureau and the Library of Congress.

Also, even though less than 10 percent of the population are now farmers, agricultural interests still receive government favors at the expense of urban residents. For example, because of extremely low agricultural tax rates, farm families are encouraged to hold on to thousands of acres of land near and even in major cities that could be used for new housing. As was described earlier, Japanese consumers on average spend at least twice as much of their incomes annually on food than Americans. A major reason is that, despite recent progress, the government still protects farmers from foreign competition and guarantees artificially high prices for farm products such as rice, thereby forcing consumer prices up.

While a few farmers prosper because of these old-fashioned policies which date back to a time when more Japanese engaged in agriculture, today the overwhelming majority of Japanese are not farmers and live in urban areas. It is these city dwellers who have created the wealth that makes Japan affluent, and in the near future the ruling LDP will probably respond to this urban constituency and reduce both tax advantages for owning farmland and agricultural import restrictions and subsidies. Then improvements will occur in the high prices most Japanese now pay for housing and food.⁸

Foreign economic competition could also threaten the general high levels of affluence in Japan. Because of hard work and low labor costs, several Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore have already captured market share from Japan in the textile, toy, and ship-building industries. South Korea is beginning to challenge Japan in automobile, steel, and even electronics manufacturing.

The Confucian work ethic seems as strong in South Korea as in Japan. Already the Korean automobile manufacturer Hyundai has increased its annual output of cars from only 60,000 in 1981 to an estimated annual figure of one million by 1990. Hyundai President Chung Se Yung has referred to his Japanese competitors as "the lazy Asians."⁹ Also, South Korean companies' labor costs are much lower than those in Japan, because Korean workers earn two to five times less money than their Japanese counterparts.

There are signs that Japanese companies, faced with this new intense level of competition, could in the future greatly reduce the lifetime employment and seniority systems. Some Japanese believe that such practices don't give companies enough flexibility to adjust to new economic situations by cutting costs, and also don't offer great enough rewards to motivate younger, extremely creative individuals. Some economists predict that in the future many more Japanese will switch jobs than is the case

⁸ Ibid., p. 280.

⁹ Halberstam, *The Reckoning*, p. 724.



One group unhappy about recent and projected future economic changes is Japanese farmers. Here farmers demonstrate against a government proposal to allow foreign competition. Photo courtesy of Linda Hooper.

now. The question is whether the great Japanese team spirit in the workplace will survive if such changes in employment practices occur.

Despite rising competition from abroad, the Japanese have several great economic advantages. Japan is already a leader in such important future-oriented industries as computers, robots, and biotechnology. In fact, the existing level of technology in Japan is at such a high level that experimental factories already exist that are virtually controlled by computers, lasers, and robots. Japan at present continues to introduce about as many robots each year into industry as the rest of the world combined.¹⁰

In addition to superior technology, there is ample capital in Japan for future investment, because of the great profits Japanese industry has made over the past two decades. Japan has become the world's leading money lender, in part because of surplus investment funds. Japan is still likely to remain an affluent nation even if external events cause Japanese companies to reduce lifetime employment and seniority pay.

Although Japan will surely remain one of the world's richest nations, already profound demographic and value-oriented trends are present among older and younger people that promise to change the social landscape.

A familiar early morning sight in Japanese cities on almost any street that contains shops is that of people sweeping and washing the sidewalks in preparation for opening. Often the men or women engaged in this cleaning operation are senior citizens who, although retired from a previous job, are forced to find work in their old age to make ends meet. Japan, with a world-leading average life span of over 80 years for women and 75 for men, and a retirement age of between 55 and 60 years, is already facing a problem that will be even more difficult in the twenty-first century: the aging of its population.

Although it now has a smaller percentage of people over 65 than does the United States, because of longevity and low birth rates Japan is the world's fastest aging society. By the year 2000 Japan will have a larger percentage of elderly people per capita than the United States, and demographers predict that by 2010 almost one out of every five Japanese will be over 65.

In contemporary Japan how older people will be supported and what they will do with the decades of life they will live after retirement are largely unanswered questions. Currently the costs of government health and retirement benefits for one Japanese over 65 is spread among six other working and taxpaying adults. By the year 2000 that ratio is expected to shrink to one retired Japanese for every four workers.¹¹

¹⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 677.

¹¹ Choy, *Japan*, pp. 79-82.

Already government and private pension programs, personal savings, and government health insurance which finance about 90 percent of the elderly's medical bills don't meet the needs of many old people. Even though the majority of elderly still live with or near their children, the number of extended families is declining steadily. Traditionally, Japanese wives took care of elderly parents, but as more and more women enter the workplace, this custom is also in decline.

The economic ramifications of the graying of Japan are thus very troubling. Already the government is seriously considering raising the mandatory retirement age to 65 in an effort to reduce pension and health care tax bills for the general population. A possible future scenario is that, because of staggering projected health and pension costs, the elderly will receive fewer government benefits than is now the case. The government, in an effort to assist elderly people who need additional money, has already established 200 "Silver Resource Centers" throughout Japan. These are employment placement services specializing in finding old people part-time work.¹²

Because Japanese workers will be faced with higher tax bills in the future for health and pension benefits for senior citizens, some sociologists fear that the social cohesion for which the country is famous might diminish if the young resent a large percentage of their pay going to support the elderly.

The problem of the graying of Japan is far more than just an economic one. Even affluent Japanese must decide where to live and what to do after retirement. Recently MITI planners proposed an unusual solution to the question of where to live that received worldwide attention. The scheme, named "Silver Columbia," encouraged old people to buy government-subsidized condominiums to be built in inexpensive countries such as Greece, Australia, and Spain. It met with negative reactions from Japanese elderly and foreign countries. Planned retirement communities, which are now beginning to appear in Japan, are a much more feasible solution.¹³

How older Japanese will spend their time in the future is unclear. Some elderly who can afford it have begun to travel to other countries, a relatively new practice for Japanese and one that, because of high affluence levels, should increase in the future. One Japanese trait that offers a partial solution to the time question is a strong tradition of interest in hobbies and continuing education. Even now all over Japan there are

¹² Phillip Goodman, "Japan Reaches for the 21st Century" (Video) (Tokyo: International Motion Pictures, 1986).

¹³ Lee Smith, "Divisive Forces in an Inbred Nation," *Fortune*, 115, no. 7 (March 30, 1987), 24-28.



Although the economic ramifications of aging present a problem to the Japanese, numerous factors including low-fat diets have meant long years of health for many of Japan's senior citizens. The priest pictured here is in his 80s. Photo courtesy of Willie Mae Beattie.

English language study, literature, and sports clubs exclusively for old people. The number of these organizations will almost certainly increase.

Currently in Japan the future of the young as well as the old is a much discussed subject. Although Japan has one of the world's best educational systems, many fear that several of the problems identified earlier in this book are severe enough that radical reform is needed.

Already Japan has taken significant steps toward solving some major educational problems. The process began in 1984 when then Prime Minister Nakasone established a blue-ribbon committee, which reported directly to him, and gave it a mandate to examine the entire educational system and propose reforms. Experts on Japanese education considered this committee, which was later named the National Commission on Educational Reform, to be the most powerful force for educational reform since the American occupation. By 1987 the commission made its recommendations, which, if implemented, will require much effort and major attitudinal changes on the part of most Japanese.

Specifically the commission found Japan's elementary and secondary schools to be too centralized, too oriented toward sorting students into various occupational tracks (because of the examination system), and too concerned with promoting subservience to the group rather than fostering individual creativity. The commission also found Japanese universities to be in particular need of sweeping reform and all levels of the educational system to be not nearly concerned enough with promoting internationalism in young people. Reform of the examination system and universities will take years, but there are already attempts to internationalize Japanese education.¹⁴

For many years Japanese students in English classes were taught to write but not speak the language. In an attempt to find a solution, the Japanese government is now spending considerable amounts of money to bring to Japan young native English speakers from the United States, Great Britain, and other countries to work with elementary and secondary school students and teachers. Also several universities are considering adding spoken English language components to their entry examinations so as to provide incentives for aspiring students actually to learn to speak the language.

But heightened internationalism involves more than language proficiency. Attitudes toward foreigners and toward Japanese who have spent extensive time abroad must be changed as well. The Japanese government for the first time is encouraging foreign students to come to Japan, and from 1982 through 1988 the number of foreign students in Japanese univer-

¹⁴ Cynthia Hearn Dorfman, ed., *Japanese Education Today* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), pp. 63-66.

sities more than tripled. By the late 1980s, with the strong encouragement of the Japanese government, more than 40 American universities have either opened or plan to open branch campuses in Japan, most of which are primarily for Japanese students.¹⁵

In order to make life easier for Japanese young people who have attended school in foreign countries and returned, the government is pressuring Japanese universities to make special provisions for their admission. Also some school districts have begun programs enabling returnees who have learned a foreign language to do advanced work so as not to lose this valuable skill.

The Japanese have traditionally had a difficult time with foreigners on a personal level, and this is one reason that people in other countries have often reacted somewhat negatively to Japan. Japanese can diminish such reactions in the future by learning to look outward and to be more empathetic to other cultures.

In addition to encouraging developments in international education, when observers of Japanese society examine attitudes of young people they see great cause to be optimistic that large numbers of future Japanese leaders will attain what only a few people, such as Amaya Naohiro, had in the past: an enlightened world perspective.

What are Japanese young people of today really like? Although generalizations are difficult, already they exhibit behaviors so different from their parents and grandparents that they have been labeled by the Japanese media as *shinjinrui*, or "the new human race."¹⁶

The generation that has come of age since 1960 has, because of affluence, been exposed to many more foreign influences than their parents. Tokyo and other Japanese cities have Kentucky Fried Chicken, MacDonalds, and a plethora of other foodstuffs and goods that are familiar to young Americans. There are American movies on Japanese television and Western music available in Japanese stores.

In addition to merely consuming foreign goods, increasing numbers of young Japanese are having deeper experiences with other cultures as well. More young people than in the past are traveling to and studying in foreign countries each year. Also as larger numbers of American and European firms open offices in Tokyo, significant numbers of young Japanese with foreign language skills find the informal work atmosphere and easier opportunities for advancement in Western companies preferable to employment in Japanese business. This is particularly true of young, well-

¹⁵ Susan Tift, "Japan's Search for U.S. Colleges," *Time*, 133, no. 4 (January 23, 1989), 57.

¹⁶ Paul Maidment, "Putting a New Face on Japan, Inc.," *World Press Review*, 35, no. 1 (February 1988), 22-24.



Young Japanese seem to be more at ease with foreigners than were their parents and grandparents. This certainly was the case with these three middle-school students who posed for an American teacher. Photo courtesy of Jane Duffy.

educated Japanese women who, because of their sex, are barred from many good job opportunities in Japanese companies.

Even young Japanese who have no particular experiences with other cultures are beginning to perceive the world in very different ways than did their parents. Young Japanese like to have fun and spend more and save less than their older counterparts. Snow skiing, for example, is so popular in Japan that in a country with half the population of the United States the same number of skis are being sold each year. Entire rural villages have established bed-and-breakfast lodges to accommodate all the skiers who flock to the slopes for the weekend, and the large majority of these thrill seekers are young people.¹⁷

Many affluent younger Japanese consider buying skis, expensive clothes, and German cars as a way to express individuality. In almost all recent surveys Japanese young people, although still quite group oriented by Western standards, exhibit a concern with individual pursuits not found in older Japanese. Many more young than old Japanese place a high priority on such values and uses of time as personal happiness, leisure time, and time to spend with loved ones. Often young Japanese view work as something that one must do but not the entire focus of one's life. A higher percentage of young Japanese than old say they are willing to change jobs if they think it will help them get ahead.

All of this probably doesn't mean, as many older Japanese think, that the new generation is extremely lazy and will cause Japan to decline. One Japanese business executive probably put it best when he remarked: "Our younger generation is definitely a new breed: They're willing to give only 100 percent at work."¹⁸ There do, however, seem to be some profound changes in the way the young generation views the world when compared with their parents.

For better or worse, high levels of affluence and the outside world seem to have exerted tremendous influence on the attitudes and lifestyles of young Japanese. Although any changes in societal values have negative as well as positive repercussions, Japan should have many creative and forward-looking men and women to face the complex problems of the future.

Whether the key to continued Japanese success lies in the traditional spirit of teamwork or in the emerging individual creativity that is being fostered is difficult to say. However, it is almost impossible for those who

¹⁷ Larry Armstrong and Barbara Buell, "The Rise and Rise of the Japanese Yuppie," *Business Week*, no. 2985 (February 16, 1987), pp. 54-56.

¹⁸ Michael Berger, "A Lockstep Society Cuts Loose," *Business Week*, no. 3007 (July 13, 1987), p. 51.

have studied Japan not to believe that whatever challenges appear, the Japanese will adapt, yet remain distinct, among the world's peoples.

Robert Christopher, an American journalist who since the 1940s has devoted most of his life living in and learning about Japan, perhaps put it best when he offered the following assessment of the future prospects of the Japanese: "Were I obliged to lay a bet as to which of the world's major societies is most likely [to be] still functioning in 2050 in a form reasonably recognizable to its present inhabitants, Japan would be my choice. . . . The Japanese, in short, have an uncommon talent for survival."¹⁹

ACTIVITIES

Important Concepts and Terms

- Kuril Islands
- Maekawa Report
- Hyundai
- National Commission on Educational Reform
- Shinjinrui

Review Questions

1. Describe in two or three sentences the major direction of post-World War II Japanese foreign policy and tell why major change is imminent in Japan's relations with the world.
2. In the future, why might Japanese companies modify lifetime employment and seniority?
3. Why is the aging of the population considered to be a significant future problem for Japan?
4. What appear to be some basic value differences between younger and older Japanese?

Essay Question

1. If you were the Japanese prime minister and had to prioritize the problems identified in this chapter that your country must contend with in the future, which problem would you select as most important? Defend your selection and suggest some possible policy options in addition to those described in the chapter that Japan might consider to solve the problem you identified.

¹⁹ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, p. 328.

In-Depth Learning

1. The following activities are designed to assist you in gaining a broader and deeper understanding of policy options and scenarios that could be a part of Japan's future.
 - Identify, if you can, adult Japanese citizens in your community who are in the United States temporarily and interview them on how Japan has changed since they were young, and their reactions to these changes. Report your findings in class.
 - You and other interested students might wish to collect a number of newspaper and magazine articles that depict some future-related issues in Japan. These could be classified under various topics and under the categories of possible future, probable future, and preferable future. You can use the articles you collect to prepare oral or written reports on specific issues that will affect Japan in the future.
 - Japan promises to be a future world leader in computer technology, high-definition television, biotechnology, and robotics. Members of the class might wish to divide into groups, do library research, and present oral reports on current and projected Japanese efforts in each of these industries.
 - More complex changes have both positive and negative societal ramifications. The following are hypothetical scenarios for Japan. First you and your classmates should list positive and negative effects of each scenario. Then take each issue and discuss the possible effects you've identified.

By the year 2000 Japanese women gain equal economic opportunities
 Japan's elderly population rises as projected and the birth rate falls below present levels.

The Japanese significantly improve their English-speaking skills.

The Japanese government's efforts to increase domestic demand fail and the economy continues to be export dominated.

FURTHER READING

Although it is difficult to find many books dealing exclusively with Japan's future that have been translated into English, the following three works deal with a number of issues raised in this chapter. *Japan: Exploring New Paths*. Jon K. T. Choy, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Japan Economic Institute, 1988) is a collection of 33 articles that depict future possibilities for Japan. Although most of the articles deal with the economy, there are essays on demographics, education, and politics as well. *The Political Economy of Japan, Volume 2. The Changing International Context*. Takahasi Inouchi and Daniel I. Okimoto, eds. (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1988) has several excellent essays on Japan's future relations with the rest of the world. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) has an insightful section on Japan in the twenty-first century.

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